

## He's not that into her; how clear should he make that?

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

### **Dear Carolyn:**

I am having fun with my girlfriend but am well aware she's not marriage material for me. She says she is fine with dating casually for now. I know girls sometimes say this and don't mean it, so what's my responsibility here? To keep reminding her that it's not headed anywhere? That seems like such a buzzkill.

Why is she good enough to date but not good enough to marry?

#### Carolyn:

She's just . . . fine. I like seeing her about twice a week, but have no desire to spend more time around her than I do already. The only real thing we have in common is that we live in the same city and like the same places. I have fun with her when we get together. I don't really think about her when she's not around, and, if I had to choose between her and the freedom to date whoever I want, I'd choose freedom.

Thanks, that makes sense. It's easy to argue that as long as you were upfront with her about your intentions, it's okay to leave it at that, and let a grown woman make her own choices.

Unfortunately, that argument is based on the premise that we are in control of our feelings and always able to act in our own best interests.

What often happens is that one half of the noncommitted couple starts to fall, noticeably and hard, for the other half, who remains coolly detached. You don't say anything about it either way - so if she isn't acting twitterpated, then you're worried prematurely.

But if she is visibly falling for you, and she either has tried to pull away but can't — or, worse, if she's saying all the right noncommittal things but is clearly pining — then it's cruel to keep taking actions that lead her on.

There does seem to be one more possibility - that you're uneasy solely because "girls" sometimes say they're fine with dating casually when they "don't mean it." If that's what this is about, then please don't assume things about her based solely on her sex. Talk about a buzzkill.

## Dear Carolyn:

I'm a college junior. My mom calls me several times a day. I would feel guilty not picking up because she's a wonderful person, she raised me, and is helping me pay for college. She says talking to me several times a day is one of her greatest pleasures. Who am I to deny that? I don't have that desire.

Still, I think this is probably abnormal... most people go at least a week without talking to their parents. I'm not sure how to become more independent. Any suggestions?

How often would you like to talk to your mom? Forget "normal" - go with what gives you pleasure, be it the pleasure of talking to your mom, or the pleasure of making her happy. Take that number of calls, let voice mail get the rest, and, if needed, assure Mom (without caving) that you're happy to talk but it's not always the right time. Independence and generosity do mix.

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.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

#### REPORT FROM WEEK 875

In which we asked for real or fictional "Learn From My Fail" life lessons in 30 words or fewer: Unless the Loser – this week, we mean that in both the uppercase and lowercase senses – insisted that the fail actually happened, we assume that nobody would be that dumb.



(a) the winner of "The Art of the Bonsai Potato": Even 🚄 if the traffic reporter on the radio says "backup on the Beltway," it's best not to do it. (Russell Beland,

- Ask questions don't answer them. H. Thomas, Washington (Kevin d'Eustachio, Beltsville)
- A bank teller won't fall for "I come from the future where guns are invisible" when you try to rob her. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

#### PASSING FAILS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Slipping your finger in through the leg hole is not best way to check a diaper. (Andy Wolodkin, Frostburg, Md., a First Offender)

Don't hire plumbers to do wiring. - R. Nixon (Kevin Mellema, Falls Church)

Don't pack last year's summer clothes and expect that they haven't shrunk in the past 12 months. (Beverley Sharp, Washington)

Besides love, you might need a bodyguard. - J. Lennon, No **Heaven** (Randy Lee, Burke)

**Bowling your age is** apparently nothing to brag about. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

Never marry into a family who thinks your name is "Him." (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

If you step on something while going down a staircase in the dark and begin to fall, well, it would have been better not to do that. (Andy Wolodkin)

Always take the deep breath before putting the blow gun to your lips. (Russell Beland)

**Home repair Web sites** suggest you put Cheerios in your toilet to show whether a clog has been cleared. They should have also said that undigested Cheerios are better for this. (Dion Black, Washington)

Dropping a bug into a bottle of liquor doesn't make it taste "just like tequila." (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

**Dudes in a Liverpool pub tend** not to agree that soccer players are a bunch of sissies who could never play real, American football. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.,

Priests don't think it's funny if you do a spit take at communion. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

The five-second rule does not apply to hypodermic needles. (Jon Graft, Centreville)

The first shot of water coming out of that hose that's been lying in the sun all day will not cool down Mom. (Stephen Dudzik, Olnev)

After eight hours of playing tennis, toss a coin. - Nicolas Mahut, France (Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)

Don't get too attached to your horse. – Catherine the Great (Beverley Sharp)

While duct tape will work for any job, it's not the first choice for birth control.

If you release doves at your wedding, cover the cake. (Beverley Sharp)

There are better Twitter names than CrazedSexPoodle. - A. Gore (John Cogburn, Southlake, Tex.)

Before you drench the odd and shy new girl with a bucket of pig's blood, check the newspapers from the last

town she lived in. (Stephen Dudzik)

If you want to get printed in a contest like this, you have to make sure that you stick to the rules and limit your entry to thirty words or. (Russell Beland)

**And actual Fails They Learned** From: **Dialing 1-800-724-2400 will** 

result not in the message "Welcome to M&T Bank." but rather "Welcome to 1-888-FREESEX." (Katherine Stinson, Chevy Chase, a First

Offender)

Contompasis)

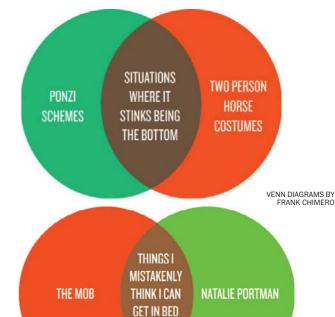
Do not tie your Christmas tree to the top of your car and go through the car wash. Although the deluxe hot wax does keep the needles on. (Ann Walker Smalley, Apple Valley, Minn., a First Offender)

**During Easter services, if your** child is playing connect-the-dots with the hymnal, resist the temptation to shout "No!" because the priest may have just asked, "Do you reject Satan?" (Jeff

Don't dye your hair while your toddlers are home with you, unless the color you're looking for is Cheetos. (Jennifer Fleming, Severna Park, a First Offender)

Next week: Oilies but Goodies, or Rhythm & Ooze

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



## Week 879: Say Venn

WITH

t's time for a little graphic humor. This week: Express some sentiment in the form of a Venn diagram, as in the ones here by graphic artist Frank Chimero, a.k.a. Frank Sparrow. It can have two or three circles; any more and we'd have trouble making it readable in print. You don't have to draw the diagram; just give us the text and we'll take care of the artwork (e.g., "First circle . . . Second, smaller circle . . . Very small intersecting area between the first and second  $\dots$ "). If you do want to create your own graphic, enclose it as an attachment and make sure we can reach you at your e-mail address. And spell correctly. Note: Your techno-purists will likely point out that the examples above are pointing out commonalities while not really overlapping; we might not be overly rigorous on logic this week either.

Winner gets the Inker, the Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a little bag of "Shark Poo" from Naples, Fla.; some "Seagull Poop" from nearby Fort Myers (both donated by Beverley Sharp); and a sack of "Bear Poop" from Estes Park, Colo., courtesy of Melissa Yorks. They are all evidently pieces of chocolate. We'll call this triple prize a scat trick - or a pu-pu-pu platter.

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, Aug. 2. Put "Week 879" 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 Aug. 21. 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 was sent by both Tom Witte and Kevin Dopart; Kevin also wrote this week's honorable-mentions subhead

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

# Area students show and spur tales at Conner

## ART REVIEW FROM C1

The Post last fall.) Equally fine were photographs by her Corcoran colleague Jenny Yang, which document the liquor store that her family owns in south Baltimore. My colleague Jessica Dawson chose her as a finalist in The Post's Real Art D.C. contest. And I was taken with the 32-inch spark plug made from paper and foam core by Chie Iwasaki, a student at Gallaudet.

But I was especially keen on a project called Camper Contemporary by Calder Brannock, a 25-year-old from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. He gave up the standard job of making the art in favor of providing an occasion for others to make work and show it.

Brannock presents an offer to his peers: If they put themselves in his hands, he will take them on a one-day excursion to an interesting site that should serve as artistic inspiration. Once his invitees have made their place-inspired art, Brannock shows it in what must be

## In Katie Miller's images, the babies are far more creepy than cute.

the world's smallest gallery, a 1967 Yellowstone trailer that he's refitted with white walls and hardwood floors, like a 98-square-foot fragment of a deluxe Chelsea space.

At the moment it's parked in the Conner courtyard, where it presents the products of five artists' excursions with Brannock to places in the District, Pennsvlvania and Virginia, to explore sites linked to the flight and death of John Wilkes Booth. The works on the gallery's small walls are perfectly good but not notably great. It is the micro-gallery itself, and the semi-satirical situation it constructs - the art world, miniaturized that is worth tending to.

Others are tending to it. Out of all of the "Academy" projects, Brannock's was selected for inclusion in the Pulse art fair in Miami in December as part of its Pulse Presents program. He gets a free exhibition space ... to show his exhibition

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## ACADEMY

continues through Aug. 21 at Conner Contemporary Art, 1358 Florida Ave. NE. Free and open Wednesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 202-588-8750 or visit www connercontemporary.com

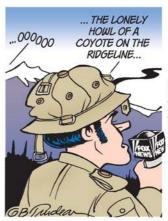


MOVABLE TREATS: Calder Brannock's Camper Contemporary project shows art in a renovated 1967 Yellowstone trailer.

## DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU









CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

