



CAROLYN HAX

Reader advice on turning bad cards into a winning hand

While I'm away, readers give the advice.

On raising a difficult child:

My brother is two years older than I. When he was a baby, he was fussy and difficult, refusing to sleep for more than an hour at a time. I slept for long stretches quite happily. Through elementary, middle and high school, he was a poor student and had various issues, on at least one occasion leading to suspension. I was an honor student with no behavioral blights on my record.

In adulthood, however, he is now a college graduate, happily married, working at a great job, personable and by far the sweetest and most loyal person I know. I, at age 26, have yet to finish college, and I'm trying to get out of a dead-end job.

Our paths have diverged greatly from what most people, including our own mother, would have predicted.

Our mother taught us to use our talents to our best advantage, both for our own gain and that of the other sibling. I have always been calmer and more analytical, while he has a creative flair and awe-inspiring musical ability. I advocated for him when he wanted a special allowance, and he taught me about computer programming, new indie bands I would never have heard of, and was always available as my backup band when I wanted to sing.

Being both participant and observer to life's long-term changes has taught me one very important lesson: While a person's past can provide reference, you never know what people are capable of until you give them a chance.

Proud Sister of a Problem Child

On getting what you need from others:

I believe in making it easy for your spouse to make you happy. If I have spent a whole afternoon deep-cleaning the kitchen, rather than expect my husband to notice (and brood if he doesn't), I tell him, "Admire the kitchen — I spent the whole afternoon cleaning." Then he admires with fervor. If you care that he/she remembers your anniversary/birthday, remind him or her. It may be less romantic than surprises, but marriage is for the long haul, and playing mind games or expecting your spouse to read your mind gets in the way of happiness.

Marseille

On Mars vs. Venus:

The writer who complained about having to be a mind reader is a married man, not a 9-year-old. I'm sure no one tells his wife when the toilets are dirty, or the food supply is low, or, God forbid, when a salad needs making. For him to say, "If she would only ask . . ." is very much beside the point.

How about getting some life skills, learn to anticipate that pasta night equals a salad, or, here is a huge step, call his wife and ask if there is anything he can do before she gets home from work. To use the "if she would only tell me" excuse is just something I would expect to hear from a child. This kind of resentment on both parts can lead to terrible consequences. Be a partner to your spouse. This goes for the ladies, too. It's a two-way street.

Finally got it right

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, 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 881

in which we asked you to find "hidden messages" in the names of people or organizations, consisting of letters extracted from the name, in order: While we said we'd accept a few identifying words appended to the name, we also warned you not to go overboard with lengthy descriptions that might yield a couple of useful letters. The best of the latter type — which still wins no magnet — was by Jim Reagan of Manassas: "Tiger Woods, Major Nike Company Investment, No. 80 in Winnings" contains "Too many swings." On the other hand, we did fall for an entry that made going overboard part of the joke: See the long, long, long one near the end of the list.



Vice President Joseph Biden: I, I, I (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

2 the winner of the 12-piece glow-in-the-dark set of Frogmen vs. Radioactive Octopus: Rush Limbaugh: Ugh. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

3 Kevin Bacon: VI. (Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)

4 The British royal family: It's a fail. (Stephen Gold, Glasgow, Scotland)

MORE INTEL INSIDE: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Yoko Ono: OK? No. (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

Parents Television Council: "Pants ON!" (Beverley Sharp, Washington)

Bill O'Reilly: III! III! (Edmund Conti)

Miss Trinidad and Tobago LaToya Woods: Mind AND ta-tas (Lois Douthitt, Arlington)

Bristol Palin and Levi Johnston: STOP IT! (Suzanne Petroni, Falls Church, a First Offender)

Grand Old Party: No. (Chris Doyle)

Helen Thomas: No mas. (Brian Cohen, Potomac)

Central Intelligence Agency: Cell? Cage? (Edmund Conti)

Steven Slater: "Later!" (Brendan Beary, Great Mills; Craig Dykstra)

House of Representatives: Our pests. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Liberal pundit Keith Olbermann: "I berate 'the man.'" (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

George W. Bush, former president: Gore won. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Dora the Explorer, also known as Dora Marquez: Repeal soon, AZI (Kathy Hardis Fraeman, Olney)

Beethoven: Eh? (Peter Metrinko, Gainesville)

Senator John F. Kerry: No JFK. (Russell Beland)

Hillary Rodham Clinton: Hard hon. (Peter Metrinko)

United States Food and Drug Administration: Tests food/rat ratio. (Beverley Sharp)

Chuck Schumer, New York senator: Hush

me not! (George Vary, Bethesda)

Mick Jagger: Ick! (Age.) (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Eldrick Tont "Tiger" Woods: Don't woo. (Kevin Dopart; Kathy Hardis Fraeman)

Federal Emergency Management Agency: Flee! (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

The White House Press Corps: The Wuss Corps. (Chris Doyle)

"Mad Men's" Jon Hamm: Mmmm! (Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich.)

William Howard Taft: Lard-aft. (Kevin Dopart)

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: Eat tofu. (Beverley Sharp)

Lou Dobbs: Loud BS. (Gary Crockett)

The Reverend William Spooner: The Reverser. (Russell Beland)

National Security Agency: No secrecy. (Chris Doyle)

Charles Philip Arthur George, Prince of Wales, Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron Renfrew, Lord of the Isles and Grand Steward of Scotland: Ha! He's not king. (Chris Doyle)

The Washington Post newspaper: Thinner. (Kevin Dopart)

Fuddruckers: Er . . . (Kevin Dopart)

Next week: Limerixicon VII, or A round of DR-inks on us



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



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 884: Rekindling the spork

The Escaladder: A combination escalator and ladder, similar to an escalator that you climb step by step. This device is often found in Metro stations. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

Here's a contest — to combine two devices or other products to make a new one — that we last did in 1998. We're hoping that the last dozen years have yielded enough new stuff to make for fresh combinations, or at least that Loser brains can churn up some new mash-ups of old stuff. (Yes, surely their stomachs can.) You can see the results of Week 265 on the online version of this column at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place wins this fabulous electronic stuffed lamb, sent to The Post by the Gospel Music Channel, probably in 2007, which is when we gave away another one like it; the Empress recently recovered it from a newsroom discard pile and installed it on her desk. Turn it on, and the lamb's hoofs wave in rhythm as a baritone leads a funky choir with great, unending gusto. You can imagine how much the assiduous writers and editors on the fourth floor of the Post building enjoy having the Empress stop by. 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, Sept. 13. Put "Week 884" 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 Oct. 2. 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 Craig Dykstra.



'Travels With My Aunt': Merrily we stroll along

THEATER REVIEW FROM C1

tone by Lawrence Redmond, is one of Augusta's eye-popping surprises: He's the septuagenarian matron's younger black lover. (The actors in the cast are all white.) Redmond also embodies an exceptionally confident palm reader and a certain Mr. Visconti, an Italian beloved by Augusta and dogged by authorities in Europe and South America.

The action moves smoothly across designer James Fouchard's giant gazebo-like set, with Pulling telling the tale as he and Augusta hop the Orient Express, alight in Istanbul, flee to Paraguay, etc. Cars are suggested by actors in chairs lurching during turns, and you can feel the tight passageways of railway cars as Bill Largess — the most frequent player of Pulling — flattens himself against an imaginary wall to get by.

Largess also has a hilarious bit as an exuberant dog, though Michael Russotto's blissfully daffy work as several different women may stand as the most enchanting portraits in the show. Russotto is fetchingly delicate as the lonelyheart Miss Keene, pining discreetly for the reluctant Pulling. Even better is Russotto's Tooley, the sweet but wayward teen who, Pulling learns as they meet on the Orient Express, is the daughter of a CIA man.

Big guy in a business suit captivatingly playing a loopy Valley Girl — the show may be a meander, but it sure has its funny wonders along the way.

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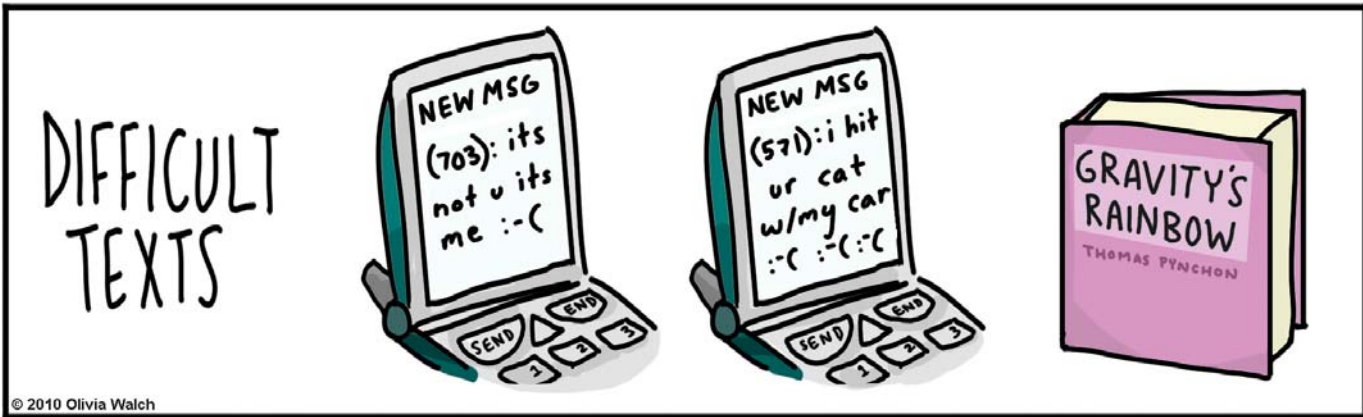
Pressley is a freelance writer.

TRAVELS WITH MY AUNT

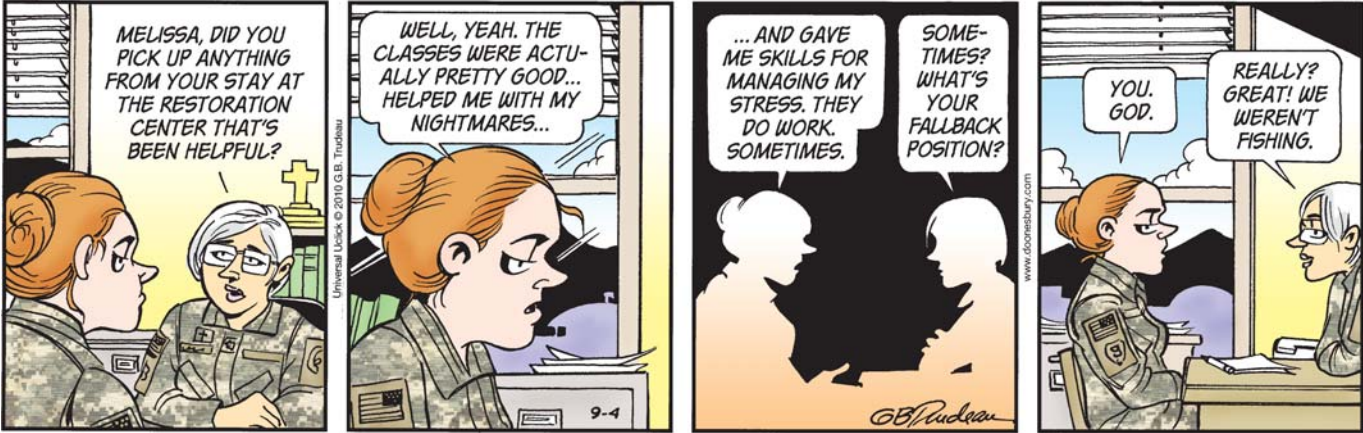
by Graham Greene. Stage adaptation by Giles Havergal. Directed by Kasi Campbell. Lights, Dan Covey; costumes, Melanie Clark; sound design, Neil McFadden. About 2 hours 50 minutes. Through Sept. 12 at Rep Stage, 10901 Little Patuxent Pkwy., Columbia. Call 410-772-4900 or visit www.repstage.org.

IMOGEN QUEST BY OLIVIA WALCH

Winner of The Post's "America's Next Great Cartoonist" contest.



DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON



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