



CAROLYN HAX

Adorable grandkids hog all the attention

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn: My sister's two (admittedly adorable) kids have become the focus of our whole extended family, and at the risk of sounding like an uber-jerk, I think I am developing a complex about it. My parents missed the big 40th birthday party I had for my husband, but traveled 500 miles to get to my nephew's 18-month(!) "birthday" party. Am I allowed to copy the little ones and throw a tantrum, or do I have to suck it up for the next 18 years? Baltimore

You're comparing apples and oranges when you try to compare the magnetic pull of a grandchild to a son-in-law's 40th. Not all grandparents go over the moon for their grandkids, but most do. Had it been your birthday, you'd have a much stronger case, but still not one worth pursuing. Keep putting in the effort with your parents, certainly — and if you aren't seeing them as much as you'd like, start inviting them more or visiting them more. But please do yourself the favor of not competing with the bunnies for your parents' attention. Talk about self-defeating.

Carolyn: Would you have answered Baltimore differently before having kids yourself? Canada

I can't know what I would have said before.

However, for roughly a decade I was the childless auntie: My parents were smitten with their grandkids, and I lived in D.C. while everyone else was in New England. I schlepped to see everyone while visits to me were rare. I don't recall ever questioning that, because it seemed logical. That era informed my answer more than motherhood did.

Dear Carolyn, My wife and I didn't plan our baby (in fact, we once said we didn't want one at all), but now we're excited about becoming parents soon.

One thing that confuses me is that, after a bit of cramping and spotting a while ago, my wife is positively petrified about miscarriage. At the risk of being unfeeling about it, I don't get all the worry.

We weren't planning for parenthood anyway, and she's pretty young (30). If this pregnancy doesn't pan out, there's time for another. The vast majority of miscarriages are in the first trimester anyway. So it's a little frustrating watching her in this state of constant panic. Can you help me get my head around this? Cincinnati

She's overreacting (and should probably talk to her OB), but your under-reaction is unnerving.

You need to get your head out of your abstract place and understand this baby is anything but abstract to your wife. She's feeling a little person move around inside her, a person she loves and feels responsible for.

The analogy that leaps to mind is of shelter dogs. We all know that many unwanted pets are euthanized — but when you go to the shelter and make eye contact with the doggies, this idea becomes almost too painful to think about. Yet the only variable that changes is your proximity — in the first case, it's a concept, and in the second, it's the furry thing whose ears you've scratched.

I hope this helps, for your whole little family's sake.

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 887 in which we supplied six lines, any of which you were to use as either Line 3 or Line 4 of a limerick. As predicted, this made for a lot of limericky variety, and only a little griping.



In debate, you were ever so deft. I felt small, of opinions bereft. *And through each passing year it became crystal clear That you had to be right — so I left. (Stephen Gold, Glasgow, Scotland)

LOW FIVES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

I parked by the side of the road Outside her (and her husband's) abode; We'd just time for a quickie, *But then it got tricky When I found that my car had been towed. (Hugh Thirlway, The Hague)

*Cut taxes! More health care! we roared, So with Bush and Obama, debt soared. And through each passing year, Who's to blame became clear: We who want what we cannot afford. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

On our orchestra leader, a pox! He thinks Johann Sebastian just rocks. And through each passing year Nothing else do we hear — He just cannot think outside the Bachs. (Craig Dykstra, Centerville)

Said Christine O'Donnell, "I weep That my critics are sleazy and cheap. Can't they assume *Displaying a broom Means I hope for a GOP sweep?" (Rob Cohen, Potomac)

A preacher took one of his daughters To camp by the mountainside waters. After catching a beaver, *He snatched up a cleaver And taught her to do unto others.

2 winner of the junky promotional figurine for the terrible movie "The Love Guru": A traveling pair from San Bruno Left their flat for a week up in Juneau, *They came back in one piece, And they still had a lease, But their condo was blown straight to, you know. (Dave Zarrow, Reston)

3 "O Susanna," he texted, "lets flee, 'yr my tru luv ive cm 4 2 c." *She said, "Never, you cad! Texted pleas make me mad! It's my bra size you're wanting, not me." (Carol June Hooker, Landover Hills)

4 The leaders on whom we've bestowed All our votes need to carry the load. And through each passing year, If they want us to cheer, They should pee or get off the commode. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

(Chris Doyle)

Eddie Haskell was bursting with pride. June learned of his nuptials and cried. He snatched up a Cleaver But left it to Beaver To tell Ward that Wally's the bride. (Pie Snelson, Silver Spring)

The new chancellor made quite a splash With infusions of corporate cash. But she sealed her own doom, Displaying a broom: it was she who got tossed with the trash. (Nari Reiner, Alexandria)

They ran off to a country whose ruler Practiced methods of justice far crueler. They came back in one piece ('Cept the shoplifting niece, Who carried both hands in a cooler). (Jacqui Brown, Easton, Pa., a First Offender)

The avid fan looked for a pass, Then saw the ball drop in the grass. He snatched up a cleaver To kill the receiver — And smashed his TV set, alas. (Kathy Bacskay, Lorton)

I said I was out with some dude — A few drinks. That was all. Nothing lewd. *But then it got tricky

When she noticed my hickey. It's the last time I'll sleep in the nude. (Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)

My plan for a Halloween feat Was to shock everyone on my street. But then it got tricky — The dogs became lick: No more dressing as Gaga in meat. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

I sought help for a migraine attack But the doctor I saw was a quack. He snatched up a cleaver And said, "To relieve 'er I'll open 'er up just a crack." (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

Once a vile old Edwardian satyr Stalked a damsel while hoping to date her. She said, "Never, you cad, 'You resemble my dad!' He asked, 'Why can't you honor thy pater?" (Bary Koch, Catlett, Va.)

I started with vodka and whiskey, Then gin, which I thought made me frisky. Now I add wine and beer, And through each passing year My consumption grows ever more risky. (William Bradford, Washington, who happens to be a frisky 96 years old)

See more limericks at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational.

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

Week 891: Mirror, Mirror

"Downtown? No, wait — go uptown! GO!!! Wait, no — DOWNTOWN!!!!!"

Flush with his success in our recent palindrome neologism contest (Week 886), new but disturbingly successful Loser Gary Crockett suggested a contest he'd heard on NPR's "Weekend Edition Sunday" back in the 1990s. We're happy to appropriate it for ourselves, and think (or at least hope) that you can even beat out that contest's winner, Peter L. Stein, for ingenuity and humor: His winning entry was "First ladies rule the state, and state the rule: 'Ladies first.' " Or the example above by Our Bob Staake Himself. This week: Write a word-palindrome sentence, i.e., in which the first and last words are the same; the second and next-to-last, etc. There may be a single unpaired word in the middle. And — since these will be fun to read out loud — the paired words may be homophones of each other (such as "pear" and "pair"). You may also add an "attribution" afterward to someone who'd fittingly say such a thing.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place wins a Special Loser Twin Snack Pak, consisting of a bag of Rap Snacks potato chips ("the official snack of Hip Hop"), donated by Loser Kyle Hendrickson, and a bag of Trader Joe's Roasted Seaweed Snack, which tastes exactly as good as it sounds, according to non-Loser Angel LaCanfora. Angel was so eager to get rid of her second, unopened bag of these things that she spent \$3 to mail them to us from Southern California ("it was that or release it back into the ocean").

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 "fresher" (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, Nov. 1. Put "Week 891" 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 Nov. 20. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's honorable-mentions subhead is by Roy Ashley; the headline on the supplement ("Limplants") is by Mae Scanlan.

Ma serves a savory dessert before the main course

BY ANNE MIDGETTE

Yo-Yo Ma has reached the level of celebrity at which the cellist could do just about anything and his fans would like it. Many artists, when they attain this kind of renown, tread water for years with an anodyne blend of greatest hits and crossover projects. To Ma's credit, his "just about anything" has remained wide-ranging and vital.

Even Ma's most obviously marketable crossover albums (like last year's "Songs of Joy and Peace") have a certain integrity. His various sidelines, notably the Silk Road Project, are evidence of genuine interests and passions. And the recital he gave at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall on Thursday night, courtesy of the Washington Performing Arts Society, didn't pander for a moment to a lowest common denominator.

MUSIC REVIEW Well, maybe it did for just a moment. But even with the lighter fare that opened the evening — a set of three short pieces by film composer Ennio Morricone, George Gershwin and the pianist-arranger-composer Cesar Camargo Mariano, collectively and oh-so-cuteily dubbed "Toute Sweet" — Ma effectively made a point about categorization and labels. Was Morricone's caramel-sweet "Gabriel's Oboe," the theme from the film "The Mission," really any lighter than Rachmaninoff's singing pop-like tune in the Andante of his cello and piano sonata, at the end of the program?

Starting with dessert, furthermore, was a good way for an artist with nothing left to prove to win over the audience — those of them who were there, since there were a lot of latecomers to this 7:30 show.

Whatever the pieces, Ma plays a mean cello. The opening of Brahms's Sonata for Piano and Cello No. 1, which followed the first set, was almost shockingly beautiful. Cello is a natural voice for Brahms's and Rachmaninoff's dark, honeyed music. Both composers specialized in piano, of course, and both sonatas on this program gave the piano an equal if not dominant role — meaning that Kathryn Stott, Ma's frequent recital collaborator, did a considerable amount of heavy lifting, while Ma luxuriated in lovely sounds.

Stott is an adroit pianist, and she and Ma play together with the easy meshing of long acquaintance, dancing in lockstep like Fred and Ginger up the duet sequence in the Allegro, though Ma wasn't able fully to overcome the challenges of balance in the third movement and keep the piano from overpowering him.

For Ma's 50th birthday five years ago, Stott commissioned him a new work by a fellow Briton, Graham Fitkin. The result, "L," strains to remain both likable (read: appealing to music fans) and suitably contemporary, careering between definite statements of tangled and very ear-



TRACY A. WOODWARD/THE WASHINGTON POST

HARMONIOUS: Cellist Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Kathryn Stott played in lockstep on a program that had plenty to offer at the Kennedy Center.

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

