



CAROLYN HAX

Mentor's private life is off-limits to mentees

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn:

I work as a peer mentor at a small nonprofit. Which doesn't make me any kind of licensed counselor, but it does mean that people let their guard down and I hear some things they'd never say in polite company.

Because of the rather virulent homophobia of one person I help, and the likely homophobia of others, I have chosen not to keep a photo of my partner on my desk. This saddens me, but so it goes.

Should she and I ever be able to get legally married, what would I do about my ring? Put it on after work? Wear it and tell them my wife's name is Susan? Wear it and wave away any questions about my personal life?

Va.

As someone in a listening profession, you probably want to deflect questions about your personal life anyway, sexual orientation notwithstanding. You aren't friends; their sharing is a business transaction.

I would say to (not) share as much personal information as you would if you were hetero. In non-work conversation, you wouldn't say, "I'm married to a man, and his name is John" — you'd just say, "my husband" or "John and I . . ."; that works for "Susan," too.

At work, set that orientation-neutral bar very, very high — no pictures, male or female or even canine. Say little to nothing about your private life outside. People tell you things they feel they can't tell anyone else. Why? Not because they know you intimately, but because they don't know you intimately.

Carolyn:

How to deal when someone asks, though? What if someone I'm supposed to be serving sees a ring and asks, "What's your husband's name?" when it's a person who might really not like "My wife's name is Susan"? Do I hope that never happens, or leave the ring at home?

Va. again

It's hard to imagine people asking that, but it couldn't hurt to prepare ways to deflect: "We're not here to talk about me." Think them up beforehand so you're ready.

I could also argue for a simple statement of fact, after which you move on: "Her name is Susan. So, have you tried those strategies we talked about last time?"

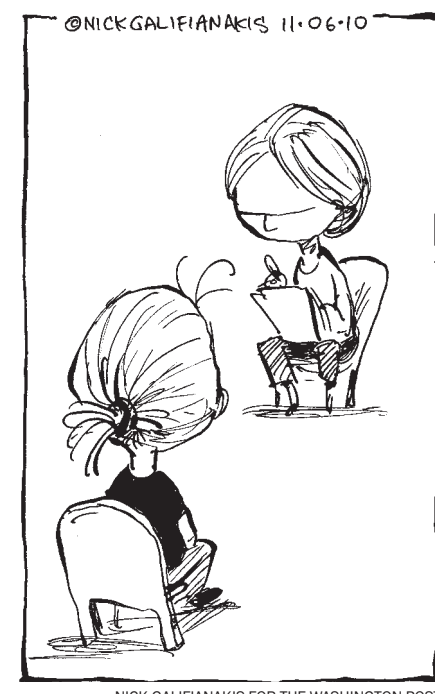
There may be all kinds of cultural friction over where homosexuality fits into society, but that doesn't change the fact that gay couples have been mainstream so long in so many places that they're almost shrug-stream at this point. Working to conceal your marital reality — hiding rings, deflecting questions, etc. — would almost be a disservice to the people you're counseling, isolating them from reality.

Yes, they may have deeply held prejudices, but that doesn't change the fact of so many people who, like you, play supporting roles in their lives. The surgeon, the tailor, the training-seminar leader, anybody, right? So, show them you're still bringing your best game knowing what's in their hearts, and encourage them by example to do the same.

The anti-gay employee might not come back, but s/he also might stop coming for countless other, non-politically charged reasons. You get to decide how much of a battle you're willing to fight.

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 889

Our annual Tour de Fours contest, in which we ask you to coin a word containing a solid block of four given letters (this year they were P, O, L and E) in any order: Have we ever mentioned that one Chris Doyle of Ponder, Tex., is pretty good at this contest?

THE WINNER OF THE INKER

Gestapolemic: Calling your political opponents Nazis. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

- 2 winner of the dog toy in the shape of a bikini-wearing chicken body:** **Pelosiraptor:** A fierce ancient beast, not yet quite extinct. (Ann Martin, Bracknell, England)
- 3 Googoplex:** An enormous day-care center. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
- 4 CEOplug:** When pulled, it often releases a golden parachute. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

POLE SITTERS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Alpoetry:** Dog food that sets off a Rin-Tin-Tinnabulation with its swell, sweet, grilled-swirl smell. (Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church)
- Trumpole:** An English barrister with an even sillier wig than his colleagues'. (Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)
- Polecatastrophe:** A date with someone who didn't use deodorant. (Beverly Sharp, Washington)
- Teleportapotty:** The holy grail of waste disposal technology. (Erik Wennstrom, Bloomington, Ind.)
- Napoleonsis complex:** The tendency to compensate for shortcomings by acquiring sports teams. (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

Slop-etiquette: Rules for feeding at the federal pork barrel. "Slop-etiquette requires that

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

- Appropriations Committee members line up first.** (Ira Allen, Bethesda)
- Dopeleganger:** A dork who looks just like you. (Roy Ashley, Washington; Christopher Lamora, Guatemala City)
- Narcolepigram:** A long, boring saying. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)
- Nincompeople:** To Fox News watchers, everyone on MSNBC, and vice versa. (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)
- Osteoplump:** "Big-boned." (Chris Doyle)
- Appoleptic:** Blowing a fuse. (Kevin Dopart)
- Poel:** Christmas during the recession. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)
- Dactylopejorative:** Hoity-toity word for the one-finger salute. (Chris Doyle)
- Kelpo:** The new seaweed diet for PETA pets. (Elizabeth Dere, Annandale, a First Offender)
- Feelops:** The airport security squad in charge of giving pat-downs. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

- Beatlepontiff:** Pope John Paul George Ringo. (Chris Doyle)
- Poleyps:** Unfortunate ailment developed by exotic dancers. (Frank and Cindy Curry, Bruceton Mills, W.Va.)
- HopeLOL:** Republican campaign slogan. (Edmund Conti)
- Drooplessness:** A concern four hours after taking Cialis. (Chris Doyle)
- Temple-oath:** First, do no ham. (Chris Doyle)
- Oculopeel:** To undress with the eyes. (Chris Doyle)
- Casserolepia:** Constellation that remains stationary over the Midwest. (Christopher Lamora)
- Anvilope:** A mailman's nightmare. (Chris Doyle)
- Encyclopiass:** A know-it-all. (Tom Witte)
- And last: Brothelponder:** The best little whorehouse in Texas (trust me on this). (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

Next week: Double teaming, or Lions + Tigers + Bears

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 893: Give us a hint

As you can gather from the length of most of today's losing entries, the Empress tends to think that short is good. (Which is handy for her, considering her own sub-Amazonian stature.) Back in 2006 we did a contest for six-word stories (winner: "They suck, Pete Best consoled himself," by Mike Levy of Silver Spring). This week we're going to be a bit more expansive — up to 25 words — as in the new anthology "Hint Fiction" by Robert Swartwood. Named because the minimal stories only suggest a plot that the reader has to fill in for himself — reading between the line, you might call it — "Hint Fiction" is composed mostly of tale-lets that tend toward the macabre or violent or depressing. For example: "Houston, We Have a Problem," by J. Matthew Zoss: "I'm sorry, but there's not enough air in here for everyone. I'll tell them you were a hero."

We, of course, will shoot for funny. This week: Write a humorously witty story in 25 words or fewer. It doesn't have to be fiction, but it should be a narrative, not just a funny musing. A title, if you include one, or a fake attribution won't count toward the 25 words.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place wins this fine play set of U.S.A. vs. Commies, which will help your children learn to eliminate the Red Scourge. Donated by Russell Beland.



ZACK BELAND

COLD WARS ARE JUST SO . . . COLD: Have fun with the Red Army and the, er, Green Army if you win this week's second-place prize.

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, Nov. 15. Put "Week 893" 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 Dec. 4. 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 contest was suggested by Brendan O'Byrne of Regina, Saskatchewan. The revised title for next week's results is by Beverly Sharp; the honorable-mentions subhead is by Dave Prevar.

DANCE REVIEW

'Romeo and Juliet,' missing the passion for perfection

BY SARAH KAUFMAN

The best part of the Washington Ballet's production of "Romeo and Juliet" (or "Romeo + Juliet," as the program put it, borrowing some swank from the posters for Baz Luhrmann's film) occurred before the curtain lifted on Thursday.

Artistic Director Septime Webre, whose choreography we were about to see, stepped out to tell the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater audience that the story is not about star-crossed lovers after all.

"It's really about love," Webre said, "illegal love," from Verona's point of view, at a time when children of warring families could not consort. And, he went on, that's useful to remember, since even today love "comes in all different shapes and sizes, and views."

It's a good message, aimed, perhaps, at the changing political dynamic in Washington and most certainly at the tragic results of intolerance regarding sexuality that have made news lately.

As for the ballet, it wasn't quite so thought-provoking. The simplicity of Webre's pre-curtain remarks would have been welcome in this bright, hyper-peppy world, where Elizabeth Gaither's Juliet and Jared Nelson's Romeo seem to connect chiefly because they're a bit less bouncy than the rest of Verona's populace. Also, they eschew the big hats planted atop everyone else.

If character development is tepid, emotions are strong: Gaither and Nelson find a single note of devotion and never let up, while a parallel love affair goes on in plain view between Juliet's mother, Lady Capulet (Sona Kharatian), and her nephew Tybalt (Brooklyn Mack). Thus Kharatian is allotted a major scenery-chewing meltdown after Mack's vigorously athletic death, in the throes of which he managed to whip up a showy solo where there generally isn't one.

Throughout, the choreography — and the dancing — can be best described as strenuous, whether in the balcony scene, the marketplace or the tomb. The ballet delivers one exclamation point after the other, and the dancers do a fine job with its technical demands, particularly Gaither, whose natural delicacy gives Juliet something of a soft side. But for all the dancers' considerable energy, the poetry evades them. It is swept away in the rush to nail the next high kick.

One wonders if the organization is on the right path in putting on full-length productions such as this one, which is certainly lively but feels insubstantial. With only 18 dancers, the



MICHAEL S. WILLIAMSON/THE WASHINGTON POST

LOVE CAN'T CONQUER ALL: Jared Nelson and Elizabeth Gaither.

company is roughly the size of the modern-dance troupes run by Paul Taylor and Mark Morris — a size more suited, that is, to small and pungent works, in which the Washington Ballet has historically specialized. For large productions, the ballet

adds a host of extras: The cast of "Romeo and Juliet" includes nearly three dozen students from the Washington School of Ballet, as well as apprentices, trainees and members of the youth troupe. Still, it is under financial strain. Citing cost re-

asons, the company is using taped music for the entire season. Taped Prokofiev, in this case.

Losing live music is a heavy sacrifice, something neither the dancers nor Webre can be happy about. It was painfully clear how much it matters in "Romeo"; without a conductor to follow the dance, there were several moments where the timing was off, enough to cause a scene-ending double-take to fall flat because the dancer missed the music. That was the case when Mercutio (Jonathan Jordan) died in his friend Romeo's arms. His collapse should have been devastating, its finality and the implications for Romeo underscored in the musical downbeat and the weighty silence afterward. But dancing to tape, Jordan couldn't establish his own musical phrasing, he couldn't craft the moment with any kind of spontaneity. He had to die on cue. You saw his hesitation, trying to match Mercutio's agony to canned sound, and the poignancy was lost.

kaufmans@washpost.com

Performances continue, with cast changes, through Sunday.

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

