



CAROLYN HAX

### For wedding invitations, context is everything

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn: Are e-invitations for weddings becoming typical? What about if the people marrying have made no effort to keep in touch for more than a year? And what if the invitation is followed by another e-mail containing three very expensive registries with an added note that gift certificates and cash are good, too? Normally, I'm thrilled about weddings, but I'm less than thrilled about this one.

Ebenezer the Bridesmaid

I'll defend e-invitations because 1. trees love them, and 2. I can't oppose wedding-expense bloat while also ruling out one harmless way for a lovely couple who are paying for their own wedding to cut costs. If invitations and postage expenses mean you can't invite Auntie Lou, then paper becomes tougher to defend.

The couple's not keeping in touch doesn't rile me up, either, unless they abruptly stopped calling, live on your street or only check in when they want something. Friendships aren't linear, and it's possible both to care and to fall out of touch.

As for the gift-grubbing e-mail, that's so foul that it makes the e-mailed invitations tacky vs. tree-friendly, and the couple's scarcity a snub vs. an accident of busy lives. Declining the invitation is the best recourse for the skeeved guest, but a bridesmaid needs a better reason than that. Smile at their hubris and go.

Dear Carolyn: My husband is not close to his family, who live 30 minutes away. In the 14 years I have known him, we have seen/talked to them periodically, but we usually have to initiate things.

A few months ago, my mother-in-law declined an invitation to one of our kids' milestone events because she was "tired." I think that was the straw that broke my husband's back, and he hasn't contacted her since.

I've encouraged my husband to call her because she is his mother, but he has procrastinated. She won't live forever, and I don't want him to have any regrets. On the other hand, she hasn't reached out to us, either, and hasn't seen our kids in a year. Should I keep encouraging him to call her?

Anonymous

How sad. Have you specifically addressed it as a matter of regrets? If you're just saying, "She's your mother, you should call," then you're not making a very forceful argument for calling.

If you've said your piece clearly and your husband's unmoved, then keep in touch with Mom on your own. But if he's just ignoring Mom because that's easier than dealing with her, then I think a good spouse will warn him of possible regrets when she dies. It's about having his back emotionally — especially apt here since that's a skill his family apparently lacked.

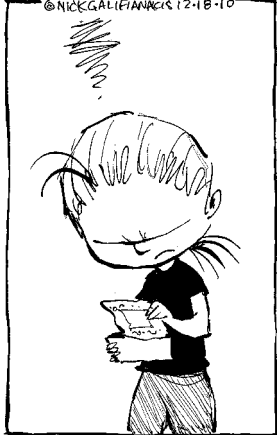
Re: Parental indifference: But sometimes you are better having no contact at all. My father excoriated me all my life, and I finally cut off all contact with him. These years since have been wonderful. I will have no regrets when he dies.

Anonymous

No argument here — but yours is a very different story. And no matter what the story, estrangement is a choice best made thoughtfully, carefully and as a last resort, not by default through procrastination.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays at 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 895

In which we asked you to write captions for any of these Bob Staake cartoons. We could sometimes tell which Losers saw the contest online rather than in the print Post; in the paper, the flag in Cartoon D had been accidentally cut off. Too many people suggested that for the dog in Cartoon B, his barf was worse than his bite.



Cartoon A: One of the famed Yellow Rhos of Texas. (Doug Frank, Crosby, Tex.)



2 winner of the spray can of Prof. Putznik's World-Famous [Word Beginning With B and Meaning Nonsense] Repellent: Cartoon D: "Hey, Sarah," Lisa Murkowski taunts, "I can see Washington from the Potomac!" (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

3 Cartoon A: President Obama's attempted compromise between the D's and the R's was completely symbolic. (Danny Bravman, Chicago)

4 Cartoon B: Though it's a loving and loyal pet, adoption rates for the Pit Bull remain low. (Dion Black, Washington; Larry Yungk, Arlington; Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

### A TOON FOR THE WORSE: HONORABLE MENTIONS

CARTOON A Arthur Dimmesdale's proctologist was actually rather proud. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Joe decides to keep the "p" he received even though he specifically ordered a "d." (Dave Prevar, or pave drevar, Annapolis)

This picture is clearly fictitious: No man looks directly at you while taking a P. (John Kupiec, Fairfax)

Seeking to draw tourists from Stockholm, the Orno, Sweden, Chamber of Commerce hit upon a novel solution. (Russell Taylor, Vienna)

Jon Stewart hires a man to sabotage the marquee sign for Rick Sanchez's appearance. (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

Harold, ever the romantic, continues to search for a gal with a "V." (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Nancy ensured there'd be no secret balloting for House minority leader. (Kevin Dopart)

It's nice that the Postal Service still is hiring letter carriers. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

Even though the G and the O never made it to the rally, Fred bravely stood by his commitment to hold his letter and lean to the right. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

Pat Sajak is caught stealing from work. (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

CARTOON B Nick Park thought he'd never make it as an animator after the failure of his first effort, "Wallace and Vomit." (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

And on the third day, Dog created earth. (Craig Dykstra, Rockville)

DNA analysis showed Loogie to be a bluetick-spitz mix. (Barry Koch, Catlett, Va.)

Even when you only have a decade to live, a pack a day is a bad idea. (Jeff Contompassis, Ashburn)

CARTOON C Chauncey attempts to break the world record for largest document ever erased with a nose. (Craig Dykstra)

Cosmo was not impressed by the portability of the first-generation iPad. (Arlee Green, Las Cruces, N.M.)

Father was not pleased to find out that Aladdin had borrowed the family carpet without refilling the magic. (Barry Koch)

Mr. Whipple wasn't as successful in selling the new Unspeakably Stiff Charmin. (Chris Doyle)

CARTOON D The Giant Wiggly Cucumber proves the most popular ride at the Camp Fire Girls' Fourth of July Fair. (Bird Waring)

The U.S. entry in the green-vehicle competition proved to have some design flaws. (Anne Morgan, Fairfax)

Lois found that the needleless cacti gave a much smoother ride. (Roy Ashley, Washington, Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

Next week: Other people's business, or Mixed company

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB KLAHN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## Week 899: Clue us in

It's another backward crossword, this one constructed especially for the Style Invitational by Bob Klahn, who's become a Loser in his own right. The words are already in the grid; send us funny, clever clues for any of them. The clues don't have to be as brief as real clues, but they can't be really long. Please say which word the clue is for; don't just write "36 Down."

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives two rolls of ornately monogrammed toilet paper — one with a fancy S and one with a fancy I that looks more like a J — ordered specially for the Style Invitational by Loser Edward Gordon.

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

### MUSIC REVIEW

## Concentrated power of NSO's 'Messiah' revives an old chestnut

Alessandrini gets back to basics, nimbly leads slimmed-down ensemble

You have to hand it to "Messiah." George Frideric Handel's mighty oratorio has long been saddled with "holiday music" status, trundled out every year with the turkey, the mistletoe and (at our house, anyway) "Alvin and the Chipmunks Sing Christmas Hits." It's performed with such ear-numbing regularity — there are no fewer than 18 performances around town this month — that even die-hard Handel lovers could be excused for getting a little tired of the thing.

But despite all that, "Messiah" can still triumph magnificently, as the Italian conductor Rinaldo Alessandrini demonstrated in a trimmed-down, high-octane performance at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall on Thursday night. Alessandrini has made a name for himself over the past decade by rethinking and reinvigorating the early music repertoire, and he pared "Messiah" down to its essentials, using a mere 30 players from the National Symphony Orchestra, a similarly modest choir from the University of Maryland and the four soloists. The lean ensemble let Alessandrini fly through the work, sometimes at a devil-may-care tempo, with precise, beautifully articulated counterpoint and extraordinary detail. The usual large-forces "Messiah" can sometime bulldoze listeners into rapture, but Alessandrini's take was an exhilarating revelation.

Fine performances by the soloists added to the excitement, though the women outshone the men by a distinct margin. The Swedish soprano Klara Ek was particularly memorable (her voice is angelic, if you'll pardon the cliché), while mezzo Alisa Kolosova brought real dramatic power to her arias. The University of Maryland Concert Choir was impressive for such a young group, handling Alessandrini's exuberant direction with aplomb. In short, this is a must-hear performance, even if you think you're "Messiah"-ed out. The program repeats Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon.

— Stephen Brookes

## Master arts organizer shares his craft

### BOOKS FROM C1

where cultural institutions pool resources for the benefit of all. He discusses delicate subjects, too, such as how to oust a problematic board member gracefully.

Throughout, Kaiser never loses his perspective: "So many plans for arts organizations," he notes, "detail extensive strategies for marketing, fund-raising, financial management, and board development, but omit one crucial element: the art."

The author is compelling as he scopes the horizon, sizing up a future in which global cooperation will loom large for the arts. (Under his tutelage, the Kennedy Center has established worldwide ties in which resources are shared.)

In addition, over the decades Kaiser has made a mark as a leader in arts education, and he's justifiably concerned about what's happening — or not happening — in American classrooms:

"Since so many public schools in the United States and across the globe do not include arts education in their curricula, we now have a generation of young people who have not developed the habit of arts engagement. This is a

## "Board members must inquire about the true impact of the arts education programming of their organization. How do the programs intersect with others offered in the community? How do children get a comprehensive arts education?"

— Michael M. Kaiser, president of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

serious issue, since we rely on this generation to be the art creators, audiences, donors, volunteers, and board members of the future."

"No other subject is taught with such carelessness and inconsistency," he continues. "Board members must inquire about the true impact of the arts education programming of their organization. How do the programs intersect with others offered in the community? How do children get a comprehensive arts education? If we only count the number of children in our programs, if we only take heart in their smiling

reactions to our student performances, we are not necessarily fulfilling our missions."

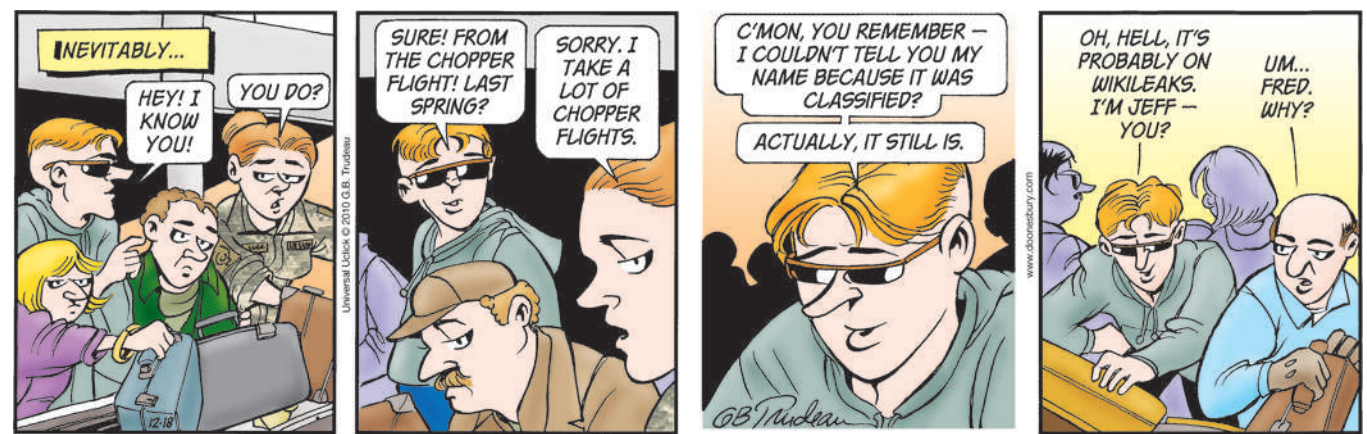
But despite his clear-eyed knowledge of the challenges, Kaiser calls for us to be optimistic: "Indeed," he writes, "a turnaround is ninety percent psychological."

Turning to this savvy, knowing book by a maestro in his field is a practical first step.

bookworld@washpost.com

Hall writes about the arts and education.

### DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



### CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

