



# A friend in deed helps a friend in need

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

**Dear Carolyn:**  
I have been good friends with someone for nearly 30 years (since college) and we live around 35 miles apart. My divorce is final today; my husband deserted the family. Meanwhile, she has a sick daughter and a husband who lost his job but has found a new one recently. She doesn't have a full-time job but has three kids at home, including the ill child. I really need to see her just to have some continuity in my life and because I like her and think she's having a hard time, too, but she has made it clear that she doesn't have time. All I'm asking for is dinner or brunch. I'm feeling like she's really not there for me. I told her I would be her friend whenever she has time for me, but I'm really not feeling it. Is this friendship kaput?

Anonymous

Would you be willing to spend time with her in a way that helps her?  
"Dinner or brunch" takes her away from responsibilities that she probably has to prioritize over you. Yes, she could lean on the husband, but she might be hoarding those opportunities for when *she* really needs them, not for when someone else needs her, no matter how legitimate that need.  
If what you want is just her companionship and continuity, tell her you're ready to bring the friendship to her on her terms — be it to tag along on errands, or to babysit for two kids while she runs the third to the doctor, whatever she needs. As an added benefit, that might get you out of your own head for a day, a place you've no doubt spent a lot of time during this difficult phase of your life.

**Re: Dinner or brunch:**  
Carolyn, I think the writer would like a pleasant escape from her problems, not to run errands or babysit. Maybe if she could offer to treat?

Anonymous 2

I get that she wants an escape, but this friend is not Fantasy Island. She's Reality Gulch. If that's where the letter-writer expects to find solace, she's looking in the wrong place, even if she underwrites it. That's putting the friend in the position to be nurturer and sympathetic ear — when this friend could clearly use some nurturing and sympathy herself. She's already giving on so many different fronts.  
Now, I don't believe busy/emotionally preoccupied people are incapable of caring about people further down their priority lists — but the best way to their hearts may be to offer a chance for you both to lean on each other. That's what I was suggesting.

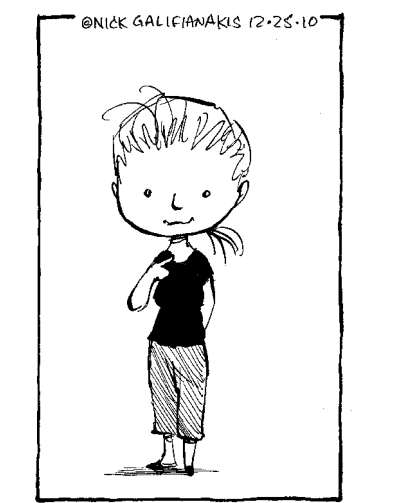
**RE: Leaning on each other.:**  
That might be therapeutic for both of them. Sometimes the best way to feel better is to step out of yourself and help others. I discovered that after my divorce, when I started helping out at my church's soup kitchen. I got so much more back than I gave.

Anonymous 3

Well said and done. If it turns out that the friend just can't or won't help, even mutually, then the just-divorcee could also use your insight as the beginning of a beautiful volunteerism.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays at [www.washingtonpost.com/discussions](http://www.washingtonpost.com/discussions).

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or [tellme@washpost.com](mailto:tellme@washpost.com).

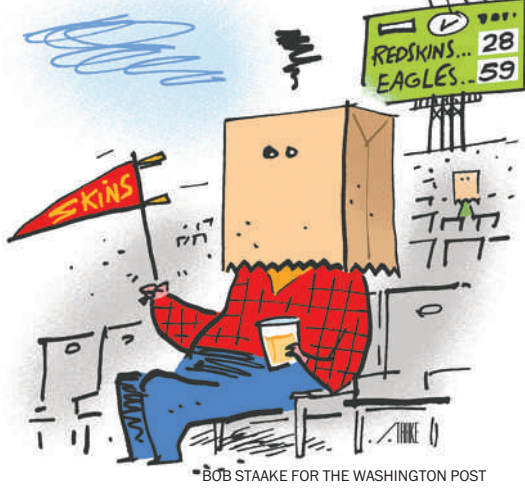


NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

**REPORT FROM WEEK 896**  
In which we asked what would happen if one institution on a list we supplied were run by another one on the list, or by an organization of your choice:

If an adult bookstore ran FedEx Field, under every seat would be a brown paper bag to be worn on the ride home. (Larry Yungk, Arlington)



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

### MERGE WITH CAUTION: HONORABLE MENTIONS

If the Department of Defense ran a preschool, each child would receive a development plan after a five-year approval process. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

If Prince George's County liquor stores ran the police department . . . Okay, if they ran the department better, maybe the FBI wouldn't have gotten involved. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Were a college English department to run Starbucks, it would be called Starbuck's. (Jeff Contompasis)

If Starbucks were run by the U.S. Marine Corps, the 87,000 possible combinations would be reduced to two — coffee or no coffee — and whichever option you chose, you would be given the other and told to like it. (Col. Drew Bennett, USMC, Ret.)

If an adult bookstore ran a preschool, the pop-up books would be far more educational. (Larry Yungk)

If the Three Stooges ran L'Oréal Cosmetics, they could still use "Three Blind Mice" as the theme song. (Kevin Dopart)

If FedEx ran FedEx Field, then you could be absolutely, positively sure you would get home overnight. (Steve Offutt, Arlington)

If the tea party ran Starbucks, it would balance the company's budget by not charging sales tax. (Joe Godles, Bethesda, a First Offender)

If WikiLeaks ran the tea party, a Mad Hater would be in charge. (Harold Mantle, Lafayette, Calif.)

If Barnes & Noble ran an adult bookstore, sales would skyrocket for its Nook e-reader. (Jeff Contompasis)

If a preschool ran an SAT prep class, you'd know you were in Bethesda. (Kevin Dopart)

If Kim Jong Il ran FedEx Field, it would still be a petty dictatorship with more media attention than threat potential. (Kevin Dopart)

If Disney Studios ran FedEx Field, the players might be more animated. (Edmund Conti, Raleigh)

If the Bowl Championship Series ran an adult bookstore, no Texas Christians would be allowed in. (Joel Cockrell, Damascus)

If an adult bookstore ran TSA, the pat-downs could be self-administered. (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

If the Democratic Party ran FedEx field, the Redskins would face a turnover only once every two years. (Danny Bravman, Chicago)

If the tea party ran Dairy Queen, it would change the name to Dairy Deviant. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

If the Marine Corps ran a hot dog vendor, the hot dogs would cost \$3,000, but their buns would be hard as steel. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

If the Democratic Party ran L'Oréal Cosmetics, it would create a new line of lipstick for pigs, just to prove its argument. (Trevor Kerr, Chesapeake, Va.)

**2** Winner of the Intel-style "Loser Inside" decal: If "Dancing With the Stars" ran a preschool, even the most awkward student could survive Musical Chairs, if enough people liked her mom. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

**3** If a police department ran a preschool, toddlers would be cuffed at naptime if they resisted a rest. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

**4** If the TSA ran L'Oréal Cosmetics, they could tell you how to cover that birthmark on your inner thigh. (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

If the Democratic Party ran the Republican National Committee, it would keep Michael Steele. (Kevin Dopart)

If a police department were run by Amazon.com, when someone was arrested for breaking and entering, he'd be asked if he'd also like to be arrested for trespassing, robbery and possession of stolen goods. (Drew Bennett)

If the TSA ran an adult bookstore, the staffers would quickly become bored, having seen much better stuff at work. (Gary Crockett)

If L'Oréal Cosmetics ran an adult bookstore, the bestsellers would be filled with makeup sex. (Chris Doyle)

If WikiLeaks ran FedEx Field, it would pre-publish the Redskins' Sunday game plans, which opponents apparently have access to anyway. (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

If The Washington Post ran FedEx Field, it would combat sagging fan loyalty and weak ticket sales with early retirement of its best players and by showing all the games online for free. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)



### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

## Week 900: Dear us!

**Dear Obama:** They're just so hard to please, aren't they? — **Sincerely, Bush**

**Dear Y:** Commit already! — **Sincerely, A, E, I, O and U**

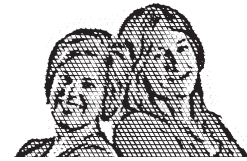
**Dear America:** Due to the current financial restraints, the light at the end of the tunnel will be turned off until further notice. — **Sincerely, The Government**

**O**n this day of giving, and in this last Invite of the year, the Empress is pleased to poach from Dear Blank Please Blank, a Web site to which some very clever and some not very clever people submit, anonymously, very brief "letters" of the form "Dear [Blank], [Funny thing.] Sincerely, [Blank]," as in the recent examples above.

**This week: Submit such a "Dear Blank" letter to us instead.** The body of the letter should run no more than 30 words, unless a few more words will turn it into an astonishingly brilliant and hilarious display of wit. Do not post your entries on the actual site until after our results appear online on Jan. 21, or else we'll assume you stole them.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives something you'll wish you got for Christmas: this handsome corrugated-steel necktie intended for use as a musical washboard. It makes quite a spirited rattle with the aid of the two thimbles included, as the Empress discovered upon trying it out in a restaurant. Donated by Russell Beland.

**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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Jan. 3. Put "Week 900" 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 Sunday, Jan. 23. 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 Beverley Sharp; the honorable-mentions subhead is by Roy Ashley. This week's contest was suggested by Kevin Dopart.



## Celebritology

Jen Chaney and Liz Kelly

## May pop-gazers be so blessed in 2011

**C**hristmas Day: a time to rejoice in the many gifts that showed up under that twinkling tree, even if none of them turned out to be an iPad after all. Then again, why limit the glee to just one day?

The holidays are about being thankful for all of our blessings. That's why we're expressing our gratitude for the gifts of notable celebrity news and pop culture happenings that were given to us all this year. Let's list a few, then raise a glass to a 2011 that hopefully will be free of Mel Gibson audio recordings, Lindsay Lohan relapses and movies with titles that include the word "Fockers."

*This year, we were grateful for the gifts of:*

- **Justin Bieber:** Not because of his consistently strong vocals, but because of his consistent ability to generate ridiculous Internet memes.
- **"Inception":** The film that changed the predominant summer-movie-season question from "Was the 3-D any good?" to "Seriously, what did that spinning totem mean?"
- **Joaquin Phoenix:** Because, until the "I'm Still Here" hoax was officially confirmed, it was not completely clear whether his behavior was genuinely nutty.
- **Randy and Evi Quaid:** Because it was always clear their behavior was genuinely nutty.
- **Conan O'Brien getting legally prohibited from being funny on television,** which made him 10 times more hilarious on Twitter and a live tour. Then he got another talk show, and now he's just normal-funny again.
- **Betty White:** America's senior sweetheart (who totally works blue) and our last living Golden Girl.
- **The DVD (and, briefly, online) release of the "Lost" epilogue,** which wasn't terribly earth-shattering, but let us pretend for 12 precious minutes that "Lost" was still on the air. And that it made up, just slightly, for the lack of answers in that finale.
- **"The Walking Dead":** The TV show that convinced us that wearing zombie entrails around one's neck looks super-cool and — bonus! — keeps one safe from attack by the undead.
- **"Jersey Shore":** The TV show that convinced us that spray tans, fake boobs and fist-pumping are not super-cool but still add up to surprisingly watchable TV.

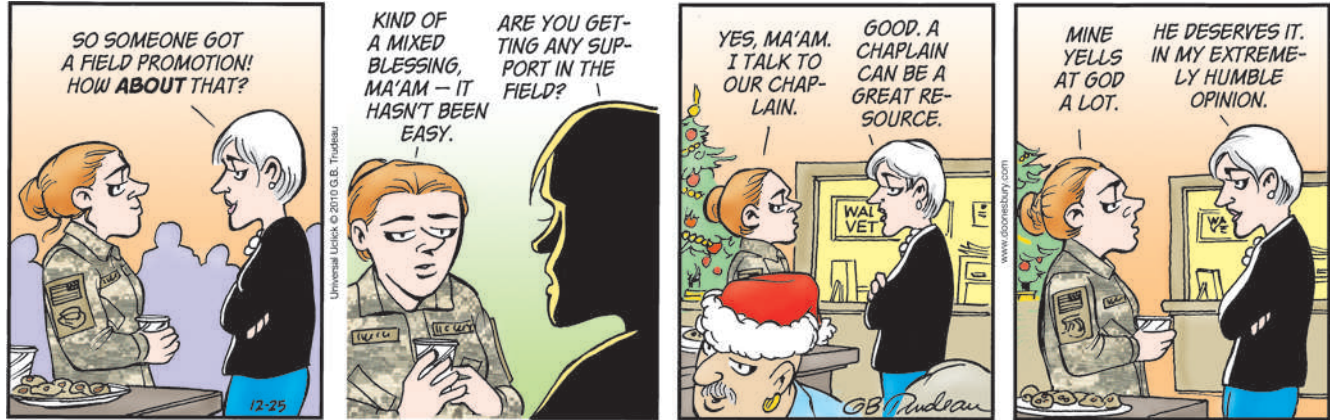


**MEMORY LANE:** Clockwise from top left, Justin Bieber, one teen, many memes; Betty White, staying Golden and working blue; the "Jersey Shore" cast achieved unlikely fame; and "The Walking Dead" offers lessons for the zombie apocalypse.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

### DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



### CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

