



CAROLYN HAX

## Two schools of thought on high school reunions

Adapted from a recent online discussion.

Dear Carolyn:  
My spouse can't understand why I don't want to go to my 20th high school reunion. S/he is very sociable, but I am shy and really disliked the whole high school experience because of the way many people acted. Conversely, my spouse loved his/her reunions and doesn't understand why anyone wouldn't want to attend.

I just don't want to relive memories that weren't good in the first place. Fortunately, we are far away, so I have a built-in excuse for the reunion organizers, but my spouse knows the real reason. So the real question is, how do shy people tell sociable people that they really don't want to be around 200 people they barely like or know?

20th

Um. How about pointing out that not everyone in the universe thinks and feels as s/he does? Surely your spouse isn't so self-absorbed as to believe that just because s/he likes something, there's no such thing as a legitimate argument against wanting that same thing. . .

Or maybe s/he is that self-absorbed. If so, then getting your point across about a reunion is a blip, and the real problem is being married to someone who so lacks empathy as to have no grasp of his/her spouse's personality and temperament.

Not that there's an easy fix to that, but here's some suggested phrasing to start making a dent in this (hypothetical) wall of cluelessness you married: "I understand that from your perspective, reunions aren't to be missed. My perspective is different, though, and I hope you'll try to see it through my eyes — or, if nothing else, just acknowledge that my take can be completely different from yours and still be completely legitimate."

Again, this applies only if your spouse is blind to your temperament.

It doesn't sound this way from your phrasing, but the facts leave room for the possibility that your spouse is aware of and sympathetic to your viewpoint — and just thinks you're closing your mind to something based on the impressions of a high-school-age version of yourself. There's a legitimate argument to be made there: that pushing past your shyness and doubts and going to this reunion could help you put some of your bad memories to rest.

It's not always true, but it is often true that the people you found so awful in high school have spent 20 years growing into decent human beings. (Consider: Would you like your two-decades-ago self?) You might wind up talking to all kinds of people you never even spoke to when you were classmates.

If that's the basis for your spouse's enthusiasm for going, then it's still ultimately your call, and s/he shouldn't keep pushing.

However, this would make your spouse's position an informed and pro-you argument, vs. the argument of someone who has no idea s/he's married to an introvert. In this case, just hearing out your spouse might be good for you, and will be good for your marriage for sure.

By the way — why do you need an "excuse" for the organizers? "No, thank you" is one-size-fits-all.

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 898

in which we asked you for humorous predictions for 2011. A slew of prognosticators forecast that Dan Snyder would offer a huge five-year contract to Brett Favre. Humor columnist/blogger and sometime Loser Malcolm Fleschner, who suggested this contest, publishes [his own predictions](#) each year in his column, Culture Shlock; of the entries below, Malcolm's favorite was the one for Dec. 24.



April 11: President Obama begins a Rose Garden news conference by saying he loves spring and April is his favorite month. Bill O'Reilly fumes that Obama's clear hatred of December is part of the War on Christmas, while Glenn Beck ominously reminds his viewers that Hitler was born in April. (Arthur C. Adams, Laurel)

2 winner of the (appropriately) Pointless Calendar: March 15: WikiLeaks posts a classified document revealing that House Speaker John Boehner hides diced onions in his handkerchief. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

3 Feb. 6: At Super Bowl XLV, reporter Ines Sainz announces that she just received Brett Favre's colonoscopy pictures. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

4 Feb. 27: Julian Assange is avenged in Stockholm in hand-to-hand combat with the Girl With the Dragon Tattoo. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

## GROSS PROPHETS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Jan. 24: Rep. Michele Bachmann is removed from the Intelligence Committee when a vacancy occurs on the Stupidly Offensive Committee. (Ira Allen, Bethesda)

Jan. 25: In his State of the Union address, Obama pledges that by the end of the decade there will be a State of the Union pledge that we will put an American on Mars by the end of the decade. (Danny Bravman, Chicago)

Feb. 15: On a visit to New York to meet with Wall Street moguls, House Speaker John Boehner embarrasses House Majority Leader Eric Cantor by ordering corned beef on white with mayonnaise at the Carnegie Deli. (Elliott B. Jaffa, Arlington, who last got ink 11 years ago)

March 31: On the Nationals' opening day, Jayson Werth tears a hamstring in the fifth inning, is out for the season. (Mike Gips, Bethesda)

April 1: Despite a slight breeze for most of the afternoon, not a single Pepco customer loses power. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

May 2: Albert Haynesworth buys a \$2 lottery ticket and wins another \$30 million. (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

May 27: The Postal Service says it will deliver on Saturdays. Only. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

June 19: Tornado strikes Delaware; house falls on former Senate

candidate. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

June 28: The summit of Mount Everest is closed for three days because of a bedbug infestation. (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)

July 17: Congress is outraged after learning that the headquarters of the Society for Learned Debate is to be built within sight of Capitol Hill. (Larry Yungk, Arlington)

Aug. 7: The refrigeration unit in Lady Gaga's closet breaks down, spoiling thousands of dollars worth of USDA Prime clothing. (Dixon Wragg, Santa Rosa, Calif.)

Aug. 15: Veteran Style Invitational Loser Chris Doyle accidentally employs amphibrachic meter in a limerick that clearly calls for anapestic trimeter. (Jeff Brechlin)

Aug. 28: Facebook rolls out a feature that allows you to spy on your "friend" who always answers everything with "LOL," so you can see if he's really L-ing OL. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Sept. 9: Marine biologists express outrage after Michael Vick says he wants to own sea monkeys. (Trevor Kerr, Chesapeake, Va.)

Sept. 24: A court decrees that Christmas, Thanksgiving, etc., may no longer be associated with the religiously derived word "holiday"; each will now be called a Federal Happy Day. (Mae Scanlan, Washington)

Oct. 13: Blackwater is awarded the Somalis' piracy contract. (Kevin Dopart)

Oct. 30: Seeing no restoration of sanity since last year's event, Jon Stewart sets a more realistic goal with his Rally to Encourage Good Oral Hygiene. (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

Nov. 12: Victoria's Secret introduces the Leslie Johnson signature series bra, available in sizes 32¢ to 38€€. (Craig Dykstra)

Dec. 24: With the Mayan-forecast end of the world (12-21-2012) now less than a year away, sales of extended warranties at Best Buy drop to zero. (Gary Crockett)

Dec. 31: The Style Invitational once again avoids being a subject for its annual obit-poem contest. (Kevin Dopart)

Next week: Clue us in, or Inking inside the box



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

## BOOK WORLD

# Fueled by moonshine, a world of lowlifes jumps off the page

BY ERIC MILES WILLIAMSON

Set in the backwoods town of Cordesville, S.C., Ron Cooper's second novel, "Purple Jesus," features a 400-pound woman; a pistol-packing, revenge-bent beauty named Martha; a half-witted romantic named Purvis, who is in love with Martha; a white-lightning-drinking monk named Brother Andrew, who has taken a vow of silence and expresses himself primarily with a deadly bow and arrow; and a host of shack-dwelling inbreeds in need of serious dental work.

The novel opens with a redneck ritual: the gutting and ransacking of a recently dead person's house. Purvis is tearing out the walls with a crowbar, looking for Army Wright's stash of cash, all the while cursing at Army, who sits rotting in a chair with a small-caliber bullet hole in his head. What follows is a white-trash tale of greed, lust, drunkenness and violence. We get country baptisms in muddy, critter-infested creeks, propane tanks, single-wides, cheap beer and cheaper men and women, rusted pickup trucks firing on only a few cylinders, glue factories that grind up dead animals (and people), Rexall drugstores, Bible-toting hypocrites and plenty of tattoos.

We've seen antecedents to Cooper's story and characters before: Erskine Caldwell's "Tobacco Road," Faulkner's "Sanctuary," Cormac McCarthy's Tennessee novels, Chris Offutt's "Kentucky Straight," Barry Hannah's "Yonder Stands Your Orphan" and Michael Gills's "Why I Lie." But though we've had our share of splendid chroniclers of America's good ol' boys, we've rarely had them rendered by a philosopher like Cooper, and perhaps never by an author with such a keen ear and unflagging precision.

Cooper understands that a redneck sees through a redneck's eyes. For Purvis, Martha's arms "fold like the blades of a feeler gauge." The expressions on a changing face shift "like the elusive colors on a fish scale." Someone's abnormally symmetrical face appears bisected "as if someone had snapped a chalk line on it."

Edgar Allan Poe wrote that every word in a short story should contribute to the effect of the whole. Very few American short-story writers have met this standard, and even fewer novelists have managed the feat: perhaps Hemingway, maybe Marilynn Robinson, Roth in "Portnoy's Complaint," Updike in "Rabbit, Run." It's a rare thing indeed, but Cooper keeps their company. "Purple Jesus" is so perfectly written, it's exhila-



**PURPLE JESUS**  
By Ron Cooper.  
Bancroft, 214 pp. \$21.95

rating to read.

His ability to switch between the muddled minds of lowlifes and the spiritual goulash of intellectual monks is, to this reviewer's knowledge, unprecedented, shockingly astute and aesthetically delightful. In counterpoint to the rednecks, Cooper gives us Brother Andrew, the vowed-to-silence monk and archer. More articulate, philosophical and spiritual than Ken Kesey's silent Chief in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," Brother Andrew is the intellectual ballast of "Purple Jesus." (The title alludes to a fruity, white-lightning-spiked concoction.)

While Brother Andrew searches for

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his reason for being, Purvis searches for Army's money and longs for Martha's love, and Martha tries to get out of hillbilly hell. Family secrets are somewhat revealed, though no one knows his own lineage for sure, since the women don't know which partner impregnated them.

The ending of "Purple Jesus" is harrowing and perfect, Cooper being not only a master of language and thought, of dialogue and metaphor, but a brilliant plotsmith, too. Details seemingly random become crucial, and events and characters converge in an unexpected yet logical flourish.

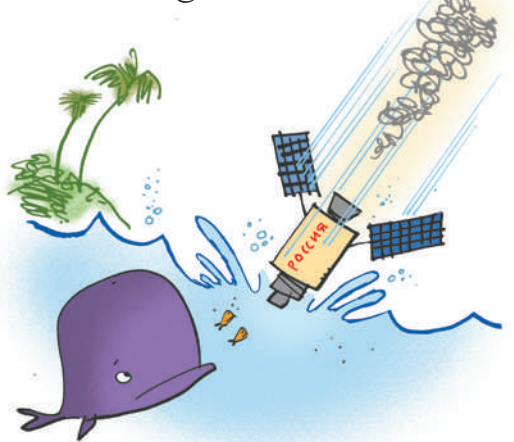
The publication of "Purple Jesus" is a literary event of the first magnitude. And once again, like last year's Pulitzer Prize winner, "Tinkers," it comes from a very small publisher.

[bookworld@washpost.com](mailto:bookworld@washpost.com)

Williamson's fifth book, "14 Fictional Positions," has just been published. His essay collection, "Say It Hot: Essays on American Writers Living, Dying, and Dead," will appear this summer.

## THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

### Week 902: What's the good news?



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

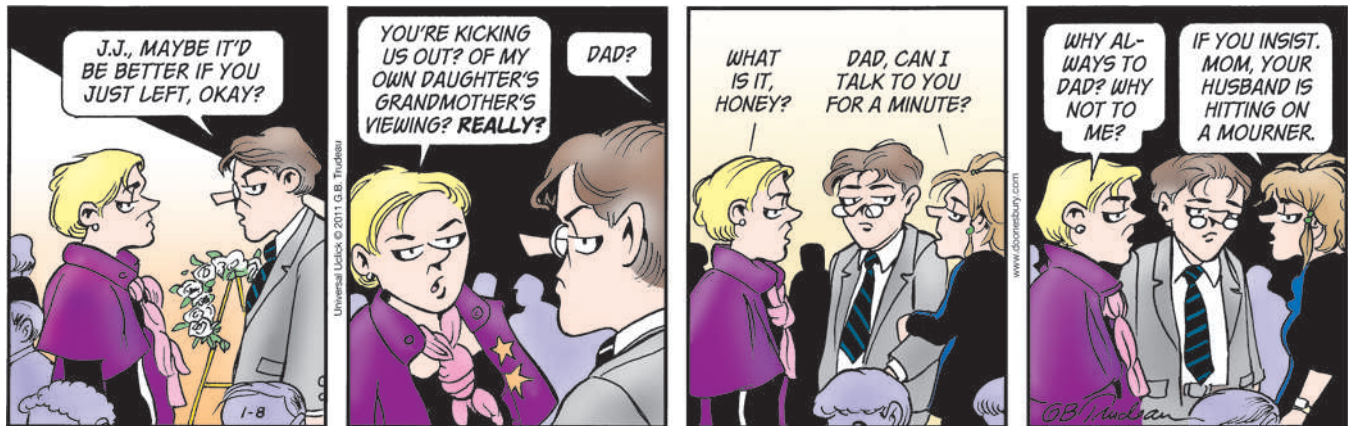
Original: "The satellites veered off course and crashed near Hawaii."  
Spun English: "The satellites successfully entered a bathyspheric trajectory."

A week ago we ran the results of our contest to take a sentence from The Post and "translate" it cynically into "Plain English." This week we ask you to do the opposite: **Take any sentence, or substantive part of a sentence, or a headline from an article or ad in The Washington Post or washingtonpost.com from Jan. 7 to Jan. 18 and make it sound more upbeat (or not so bad),** as in the example above that Jeff Contompasis submitted as an "anti-Invitational" entry for Week 897. If there's anyone who should ace an obfuscation contest, it's a Washingtonian.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second prize receives the mug, at left, celebrating the FBI-NYPD Joint Terrorist Task Force, depicting a cross between Boris Badenov and Spy vs. Spy, but with less subtlety. Donated by Loser Cheryl Davis.

**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](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Tuesday, Jan. 18. Put "Week 902" 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 Feb. 6. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, or their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results was submitted by Kevin Dopart. The honorable-mentions subhead is by Brendan Beary.

## DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



## CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

