

DIVERSIONS

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

Wit-ifs: Winning wonderings

BY PAT MYERS

Our Week 1497 contest was as wide open as you could get. It was simply "What if" something had happened that hadn't, or were happening that hadn't been, or might (but probably not) happen in the future.

4th place:

If polygamy were still the prevailing family structure, insults would have to be much more specific: "Yo Third Mama, the one with the red hair who doesn't wear glasses, is so fat that, uh, I forget where I was going with this. . ." (*Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.*)

3rd place:

What if the cellphone had never been invented? I guess we'd all just be staring at our hands a lot. (*Sarah Walsh, Rockville*)

2nd place and the winner of the ridiculously small men's swimsuit:

What if no one had invented the question mark. (*Frank Mann, Washington*)

And the winner of the Cloning Achievement:

What if I had married my high school sweetheart? Well, by now, I'd probably be charged with bigamy. (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.*)

THE IF-RAFF:

Honorable mentions

What if all peppercorns were white? My beard would be described as "salt-with-black-hairs-in-it." (*Kevin Dopart, Washington*)

What if Mark Meadows had hired a young man to be his White House aide? For one, there'd still be ketchup on the wall. (*Steve Smith, Potomac*)

If a Greek messenger had run 26.2 miles after the Battle of Salamis, people today would be holding walkalimis, telelamis, readalimis. . . (*Duncan Stevens*)

What if sharks could vocalize like whales? They would go ahead and do that "Jaws" music themselves. (*Beverly Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.*)

If Earth had two moons, men would have twice as many reasons to blame women for everything. (*Sarah Walsh*)

If humans regulated body temperature by panting like dogs, Winston Churchill would have had nothing to offer but "blood, toil, tears and drool." (*Duncan Stevens*)

If Moses hadn't led the people of Israel through the Red Sea, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene would be concerned about Hittite space lasers. (*Duncan Stevens*)

If the Lord had found another five or six righteous residents, Sodom and Gomorrah would have been spared, and Lot's wife wouldn't have spent the next few millennia on the rim of a margarita glass. (*John McCooey, Rehoboth Beach, Del.*)

If the selfie had never been invented, people would have to find some other reason to walk backward over cliffs. (*William Kennard, Arlington*)

What if a cabal of politicians who are cannibalistic, Satan-worshipping pedophiles were running a global child sex-trafficking ring out of a D.C. pizzeria? Madison Cawthorn would claim he'd been invited to join. (*Drew Bennett, Rogers, Ark.*)

What if all cars came with turn signals? Wait — they all do? Then where's yours? (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village*)

What if all the brokenhearted people living in the world agreed? They'd let it be. (*Dave Airozo, Silver Spring*)

What if alternating-current inventor Nikola Tesla came forward in time and discovered that the cars named for him run on direct current? He'd be the first person to unfollow Elon Musk for nothing he said. (*Michie March, Ellicott City*)

What if Donald Trump had been born into a family that wasn't rich? Donald who? (*Neal Starkman, Seattle*)

What if covid spread by flatulence instead of from breathing? Republicans would demand the right to eat in restaurants with no pants and would call underwear a government conspiracy. (*Daniel Galef, Tallahassee*)

What if everyone in the world were offered \$440 million to work for 15 years from March through October? Not a single person would reject that offer unless the person played for the



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

New contest for Week 1501: Try a little 'kindness'

This week's contest comes from recent First Offender Al Lubran, who'd come across, indirectly, an entertaining exchange on Reddit's CasualUK forum: Someone named Graharg posed this question: "Whenever I see a car with a ticket I chuck it in the bin so the driver doesn't have to pay," Graharg announced, then put it to their fellow Brits: "What act of kindness do you do for strangers?"

The Redditors immediately picked up the joke: "When my neighbours put their bin out in the evening I take them straight back in for them before morning, so they don't get stolen in the night," confided Mirrorshades.

"Whenever there's a meeting on a Friday afternoon, I like to ask lots of questions at the end so no one else feels embarrassed about the stony silence," FlibV1 chimed in.

You get it. This week: Tell about an "act of kindness" that you or someone else does that, well, won't be appreciated, as in the examples above. (We'll be speaking American, though.) They should be expressed as if you think the act is actually a good thing.

Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1501 (no capitals in the Web address). **Deadline is Monday, Aug. 22;** results appear, urp, Sept. 11 in print, Sept. 8 online.

BLUEQ.COM
Ankles labeled with two other body parts: This week's second prize.

Winner gets the Cloning Achievement, our Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a pair of high-quality men's socks imprinted with rows of tiny cartoon houses and the label "Head of the Household" — with the word "butt" added above it, so you get "Butt Head of the Household." Ha ha! Presumably intended as a gag Father's Day gift. Donated by Loser Dave Prevar, whose feet have not touched them.

Other runners-up win their choice of our "For Best Results, Pour Into Top End" Loser Mug or our "Whole Fools" Grossery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our lusted-after Loser magnets, "A Small Jester of Appreciation" or "Close, but Ceci N'est Pas un Cigare." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/inviteFAQ. The headline "Wit-ifs" is by Chris Doyle; Jesse Frankovich wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev; "like" the Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; and follow @StyleInvite on Twitter.

● **The Style Conversational:** The Empress's weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. See this week's at wapo.st/conv1501.

Washington Nationals. (*Howard Walderman, Columbia*)

What if before every airing of Tucker Carlson there was a warning: "This is complete BS?" Well, people still smoke cigarettes with the warning "Smoking causes cancer," so I guess nothing would change. (*Drew Bennett*)

What if George Washington had really stood up in that boat crossing the Delaware River and he fell in and drowned? This contest would be in The Cornwalls Post. (*Melissa Yorks, Gaithersburg*)

What if Google didn't exist? People would return to less invasive methods of investigating prospective romantic partners, like sifting through their trash. (*Karen Lambert, Chevy Chase*)

What if helium were heavier than air? An amorous guy could pop a balloon, inhale, and sound like Barry White. (*Sarah Walsh*)

What if humans could hear the same frequencies as dogs? Then we'd need to say things like "Rubio's tweet about the 'Soros backed prosecutors' was clearly an antisemitic mousewhistle." (*Duncan Stevens*)

What if kids came with an instruction manual? My luck, it would be from Ikea. (*Aaron Olszewski, Silver Spring*)

What if Thanos hadn't snapped his fingers in "Avengers: Infinity War?" Then we'd really have a shortage of baby formula. (*Jesse Rifkin, Arlington*)

What if Lord Voldemort ran for president? Not a single Republican would ask to see his birth certificate. (*Mark Raffman, Reston*)

What if Michael Jordan ran an airline? It'd also be called Air Jordan, and the cheapest ticket would cost \$10,000. (*Sam Mertens, Silver Spring*)

What if Mike Pence runs for

president in 2024? You'd definitely want to buy stock in a magnetometer company. (*Steve Smith*)

What if Neil Young's band were all Jewish? It would be called Meshuggeneh Horse. (*Steve Leifer, Potomac*)

What if other businesses gave out samples like grocery stores? We'd all line up for them at banks and casinos but not so much in STD clinics. (*Jon Gearhart, Des Moines*)

What if people had bark for skin? Couples could keep the fire in their relationship just by rubbing together. (*Jon Gearhart*)

What if pigs could fly? The carwash and umbrella industries would boom! (*Dave Airozo; Robyn Carlson, Keyser, W.Va.*)

What if Stephen King had written "A Visit From St. Nicholas?" It would have opened, "Twas the night before Christmas, when all thro' the house/Not a creature was stirring, 'cept an ax-murdering spouse. . ." (*Jeff Contompasis*)

What if the NRA ran a dental office? They'd teach kids that candy doesn't cause cavities — kids cause cavities. (*Leif Picoult, Rockville*)

If Jeff Bezos had not purchased The Washington Post, then every day it would run disclaimers saying, "Jeff Bezos, who founded Amazon, has no interest in The Washington Post." (*Allan Grady, Fredericksburg*)

And Last: What if I had a time machine? I would fast-forward a couple of weeks to see what the winner is in this contest, and send it as my own entry. So, yeah, I guess I really don't deserve a time machine. (*Tom Witte*)

Still running — deadline Monday night, Aug. 15: Our contest for new words whose letters add to 15 Scrabble points. See wapo.st/invite1500.

L.A. TIMES SUNDAY PUZZLE

EDITED BY RICH NORRIS AND JOYCE NICHOLS LEWIS

"BEGGING THE QUESTION" BY MARYELLEN UTHLAUT

ACROSS
1 Sticky situation
5 Feeling no pain
9 Hard exterior
14 Rock projection
19 Field of study
20 On a cruise
21 Adele chart-topper that won three Grammys
22 ___ skeleton
23 York, Jersey, Mexico, etc.
26 TV, radio, newspapers, etc.
27 Minnesota twins?
28 Like modern farmhouse decor
29 Small chess piece
30 "Breaking Bad" star Cranston
31 More slippery
33 Legless reptile
35 Muse of poetry
37 Swiped, in a way

88 1973 Toni Morrison novel
90 Aptly named cooler brand
91 Nick at ___
95 Smithwick's beer
96 Ralph Emerson?
100 Like corned beef
101 Orderly method
103 Art studio stand
104 Impulse-conducting cells
106 Lock of hair
108 Soul singer Baker
111 "___ you clever!"
112 Informal name for Google Talk
114 Old Dodge subcompact
117 Hopeless cases
119 Hang loosely
121 Naproxen brand
122 "Mice guys finish last?"
125 Stuff to sell
126 Respected figure
127 Seesaw sitter of

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Answers to last week's puzzle below.

classic tongue twisters
128 Not engaged
129 Lowered oneself?
130 Like the sound of bagpipes
131 Mix together
132 Scallion kin

DOWN
1 Private home?
2 Humorously
3 Anchor venue
4 "Lah-di-___"
5 The great outdoors
6 Puts to work
7 Softens
8 Washbowl
9 City with two MLB teams
10 Has high regard for
11 Forearm bone
12 Whole bunch
13 "Chinatown" screenwriter
14 Scold harshly

15 Applies, as pressure
16 Sesa Street?
17 Greek earth goddess
18 Lively spirit
24 Ice Capades setting
25 Cybercurrency
32 All things considered
34 Hawaii's Mauna
36 Cheer-full message
37 Health resort
38 Food regimen
40 Stepped heavily
41 Missile housing
43 37-Down staffer
44 Goings-on
47 Playing for time
48 "Be silent," in music
49 Mild Dutch cheese
52 Apex
55 A.E. Housman's "A Shropshire"
57 Sioux City state

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Former German Chancellor
59 Algae-eating aquarium critter
61 House speaker
63 In a regretful manner
64 Guess ___?
66 Italian peak
68 "Such a pity!"
69 Some musical works by Kaija Saariaho
71 Rental document
72 Emerald, for one
73 Nosed (out)
76 CAPTCHA prey
79 Academic status
82 Entice
83 Pet collar target
85 British school
87 Most saccharine
89 Attacked

92 Raymond Burr crime series
93 Sci-fi monster's appendage
94 Mag managers
97 "___ Pinafore"
98 Former Chinese Premier
99 Adjust, as car wheels
100 Hex
102 Visit faraway places
105 Tiny headphone
107 Seed scatterer
109 Sacred emblem
110 Fennelike herb
112 Goggle
113 Extended family
115 Burrowing insectivore
116 Needing extra sunscreen?
118 Etc. kin
120 ___ Squad: Best Buy tech support
123 Like unbuttered toast
124 Zero, in soccer

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HOROSCOPE

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

Happy Birthday | Aug. 14: You are alert and quick to assess what is happening. You have a witty sense of humor and excellent communication skills. You are interested in many things. You are in the first year of a new nine-year cycle. Stay light on your feet. Be curious and ready to explore new opportunities and directions.

Moon Alert: Avoid shopping or important decisions from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. After that, the Moon moves from Pisces into Aries.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) You see better ways to earn money and better ways to use whatever you already have in terms of possessions or your wealth. This is because you are open to better ways of doing things.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) You have a lot of energy to work hard. If what you do benefits others as well as yourself, you will reap greater rewards.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) Don't feel diminished by criticism. You are who you are, and that's all you have to worry about. Ironically, something that you are working on behind the scenes is improving.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) Whatever you are doing will encourage others to give it their best shot, and the result might be something better for everyone. People will listen to you.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) You're determined to achieve your aims. Fortunately, with the Sun and Venus in your sign, you are empowered and charming. (Small wonder everything will go your way.)

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Make travel plans or do something related to medical matters, the law or higher education. The reason you will be effective is you are purposeful, determined and unwavering in your motivation.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) If you encounter disputes with someone about shared property, inheritances or insurance issues, you will win the argument. Furthermore, the placement of the Sun and Venus in your chart right

now promotes your popularity with others.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) Because you look good to people, you will hold your own with someone who might be demanding. Try to see things from their perspective. (Of course, there are none so deaf as those who are wearing headphones.)

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) You will accomplish a lot because you are relentless. Note: If you work for the benefit of others as well as yourself, your rewards will be greater.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) This is the perfect day to practice

how to improve a technique or a particular skill. Whatever you do also might benefit others, especially young people. If so, you really win.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) Look for ways to make improvements around home. Repairs, renovations and redoing anything to make it look better will please you. You also might help someone else and their efforts to make improvements. If so, it will be a win-win situation.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) You are convincing. It's almost as if you have X-ray vision and so you see the subtext of things and why people want to do what they do.

Answers to last week's puzzle.

G	U	S	T	W	A	F	T	P	S	S	T	C	A	R	T	S
A	V	A	I	L	I	S	L	A	R	E	A	R	O	R	I	O
B	R	U	T	A	L	C	H	A	M	P	A	G	N	E	Y	E
L	A	C	O	N	I	C	K	E	A	N	U	S	H	O	W	D
E	Y	E	A	N	A	I	C	E	B	E	T	E				
S	I	G	N	A	L	O	N	E	S	L	I	F	E	A	W	A
B	A	S	E	S	T	A	R	T	Y	E	T	L	O	B	E	
A	R	M	A	N	I	H	I	C	D	C	O	N	H	O	L	L
G	O	A	L	O	N	V	A	C	A	T	I	O	N	C	O	N
G	M	C	T	W	I	N	I	N	A	V	O	T	E			
Y	A	K	S	A	N	D	A	L	D	O	L	L	A	R	S	A
L	U	R	E	B	O	A	I	S	E	E	M	O	E			
I	H	E	A	R	D	M	E	A	L	G	E	N	E	R	A	T
M	A	T	T	E	M	I	L	D	O	L	E	S	T	E	N	T
A	S	T	I	W	O	N	G	A	M	U	T	L	O	S	E	
C	H	A	N	G	I	N	G	T	H	E	T	O	P	I	C	A
D	O	R	A	R	O	T	M	A	R	M	S	G				
A	P	P	A	R	E	L	I	N	E	P	T	E	L	B	A	R
S	L	I	N	G	I	N	C	O	M	E	T	A	X	F	O	R
H	E	N	C	E	S	T	I	R	W	O	K	E	R	E	E	V
E	A	S	E	S	A	H	A	S	S	P	A	S	S	T	E	M

8/7/22