

Week 1518: The Style Expirational

After 29³/₄ years, our ink runs dry

BY PAT MYERS AND GENE WEINGARTEN

Many, many years ago — in a previous century — a top editor of The Washington Post walked into the office of the Czar of The Style Invitational. The office was, as always, a cluttered mess, which offended this elegant man who wore three-piece suits and carried a pocket watch on a fob. That day, the editor was on a mission. He disapproved of this new addition to his Sunday paper, and dourly warned his coarse and rumpled underling: “I will not permit you to make your contest a repository of bathroom humor.” The Czar met his boss’s eyes. “Sir, you may rest assured that I will not make The Style Invitational a suppository of bathroom humor.”

The editor shuddered almost imperceptibly, and departed, with maybe just a hint of a smidge of a smile. He secretly appreciated moxie, and in time he became one of The Style Invitational’s biggest supporters.

And that’s because Mr. Fob appreciated, despite the jokes about excreta and the risqué innuendo and the silly prizes, that the Invite had also become . . . sophisticated. Right from the beginning in 1993, through 11 years of the Czar and then 19 years of his usurper, the Empress, the Invitational gleefully mixed



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

vulgarity with urbanity, involving political commentary and jokes that assumed the reader’s familiarity with literature, history, science and the news of the day. Rude, sometimes, but smart-rude.

As the Earth traveled around and around the sun — 29.75 times — management changed, sensibilities changed, sensitivities changed. The Invitational had thrived on the forbearance of a series of slightly nervous but ultimately trusting editors. That all ends today, quite suddenly, in this final week. We are done.

By “we,” of course, we mean not just ourselves but the Loser Community, the more than 5,000 very funny people who’ve gotten ink over these past 1,517 weeks, in more than 55,000 published entries, willing to work hours on end for a cheesy form of glory, and for silly trinkets.

And so we devote this page to some of The Style Invitational’s most memorable entries, which we’ve chosen (in no particular order) from many hundreds nominated in the past week by Invite Losers and fans.

It’s our last laugh.

Underachiever’s Midlife List of Goals: Win the admiration of my dog. (*Jean Lightner Norum, Week 413, 2001*)

Neologisms containing POLE: Gestapoleemics: Calling your political opponents Nazis. (*Chris Doyle, Week 889, 2010*)

Change a movie title by one letter: Four Weldings and a Funeral: A man attaches a set of rocket engines to his Chevy and momentarily achieves his dream of driving a flying car. (*Gary Crockett, Week 871, 2010*)

“Joint legislation” by current members of Congress: The Traficant-DeLay-Akaka Roadside Port-A-Pot Act (*Carole and Stephanie Dix, Week 5, 1993*)

Change a word by one letter: Sarchasm: The gulf between the author of dry wit and the recipient who doesn’t get it. (*Tom Witte, Week 278, 1998*)

Two words differing by one letter: The difference between genial and genital: It’s okay to greet your neighbors with a genial wave. (*Brendan Beary, Week 670, 2006*)

Good/bad/ugly jokes: *Good:* You get to spend a summer’s day at a beautiful beach. *Bad:* It’s awfully crowded and noisy. *Ugly:* It is June 6, 1944. (*Beverley Sharp, Week 1058, 2014*)

Something you don’t want to hear after getting married: “Now that’s a coincidence. My birth mother’s name was Clytemnestra de Nunkyhaven, too!” (*Jennifer Hart, Week 229, 1997*)

“Fa-” limericks: A physicist/humorist, Nell, Had a comedy show where she’d tell

Of her spreadsheeting gaffes; It drew thousands of laughs Because *farce* equals math times Excel. (*Matt Monitto, Week 1033, 2013*)

Then and now: *Then:* Mayberry and Opie. *Now:* Mayberry and opioids. (*Bruce Carlson, Week 1242, 2017*)

Only-in-Washington pickup lines: Babe, why are you wasting your time with an assistant to a deputy secretary, when you could be with ME, a deputy assistant undersecretary? (*Dan Steinberg, Week 519, 2003*)

“Breed” two racehorse names and name the foal: Perfect Saint x Caribbean = Francis of a C Sea (*Danielle Nowlin, 2016*)

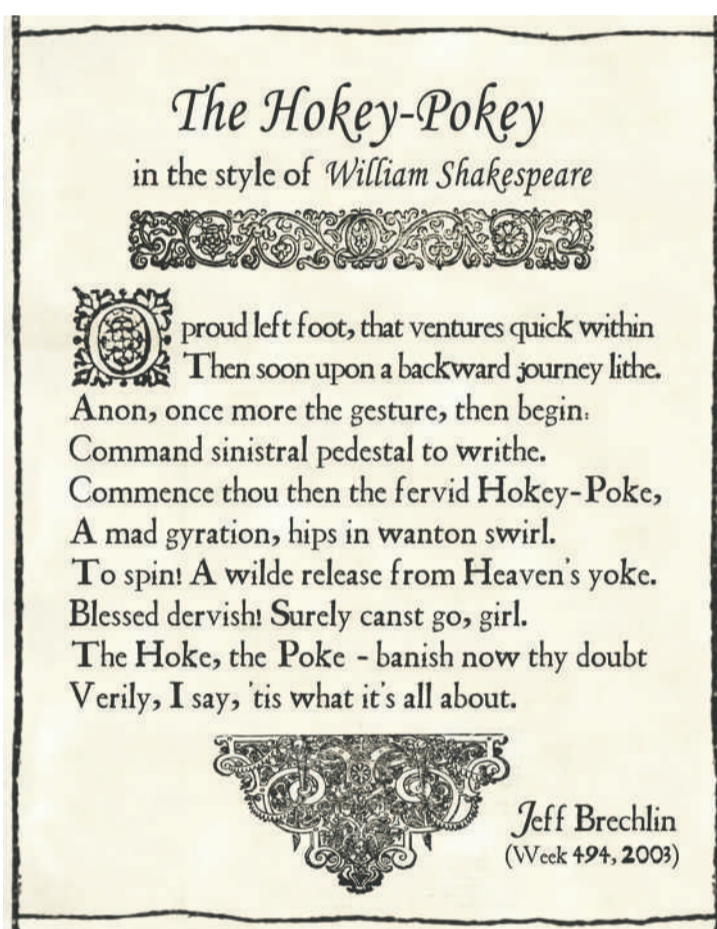
Life on the Road x Villainous = RV Weinstein (*Steve Langer, 2020*)

Neologisms totaling 14 Scabble points: Buphone: An ill wind from Washington that blows nobody any good. (*Stephen Dudzik, Week 1402, 2020*)

“Balliol rhymes,” mini-verses about people: My name is Lady Liberty. I welcome you, if you should be With bulging purse, and you’re from Norway. Otherwise, back out the doorway. (*Nan Reiner, Week 1372, during the Trump administration*)

What to do with the 14-mile supercollider tunnel: Just rename it the Martha Washington Monument. (*Michael Sweet, Week 35, 1993*)

Good/bad ideas: *Good idea:* Give her a bowl of irises. *Bad idea:* Give her Ebola viruses. (*Frank*



GRAPHIC BY VALERIE HOLT

Many readers’ favorite Invitational entry ever. The contest was for a set of instructions in the style of a famous writer.

Osen, Week 1091, 2014)

Signs of spring in Washington: In a lighthearted, festive mood, Metro riders read the Economist instead of Congressional Quarterly. (*David Genser, Week 209, 1997*)

Bad product endorsers: John Wayne Bobbitt for Microsoft. (*Chuck Smith, Week 52, 1994*)

Lorena Bobbitt for Johnson Wax. (*Larry Yungk, Week 783, 2008*)

Bad things to say in a job interview: *Applicant:* “Say, those girls in the photos on your desk, are they seeing anyone, well not the fat one, but those other two?” (*Russell Beland, Week 698, 2007*)

“Dear xxx” notes: Dear President Lincoln: Please note change to “87” for conciseness. - Sincerely, Copy Editor (*Beverley Sharp, Week 900, 2011*)

Cynical takes on platitudes: You can do anything if you want it bad enough. That is why we see so many people who can fly. (*Elden Carnahan, Week 531, 2003*)

Never say die. I’ve tried, and it doesn’t actually make people die. (*Tom McCudden, Week 531*)

Bogus trivia about winter: Phi Kappa Rho fraternity at the University of Northwestern Maine canceled this year’s “yellow-snow” name-writing contest because college students no longer know how to use cursive. (*Mark Raffman, Week 1360, 2019*)

“Secrets”: During boring meetings, I pretend everyone present is naked. And goodlooking. And female. And a kangaroo. (*Art Grinath, Week 633, 2005*)

And Last: New doctrines: Carnahan’s Rule of Three: The longer one works to bring ironic Talmudic allusion and elegant Chaucerian wit to one’s entry, the greater the likelihood the winner will feature “drool,” “snot” or “poopy.” (*Elden Carnahan, Week 69, 1994*)

Many more Invitational classics (googly eyes! video!) online at wapo.st/invite1518.

Last week we showed a bowlful of 29 disembodied little clown heads that will no longer be made into Clowning Achievement trophies and asked what to do with them. These three win a head, though not the trophy.

Make a diorama of the heads attending the funeral of The Style Invitational and call it the Clowning Bereavement. (*Jesse Frankovich, Lansing, Mich.*)

Truck nuts for tricycles. (*Don Norum, Charlottesville, Va.*)

Petition Congress for one square foot of space on the National Mall for a Style Invitational Memorial. It’d be like the Vietnam Memorial, except instead of a powerful minimalist tribute to the lives of thousands of lost soldiers, it’d be a bunch of creepy little clown heads on sticks. (*Laurie Brink, Mineola, N.Y.*)

In the Conversational: You be the judge!

In the Empress’s final Style Conversational column, readers can vote for their favorite Ask Backwards entries from Week 1514, whose results would have run this week. And the E tells how to enjoy classic Invite ink, stay with the Loser Community, and maybe even enjoy new contests. See wapo.st/conv1518.