

The Style Invitational

WEEK 238: CHALK IT UP TO STUPIDITY

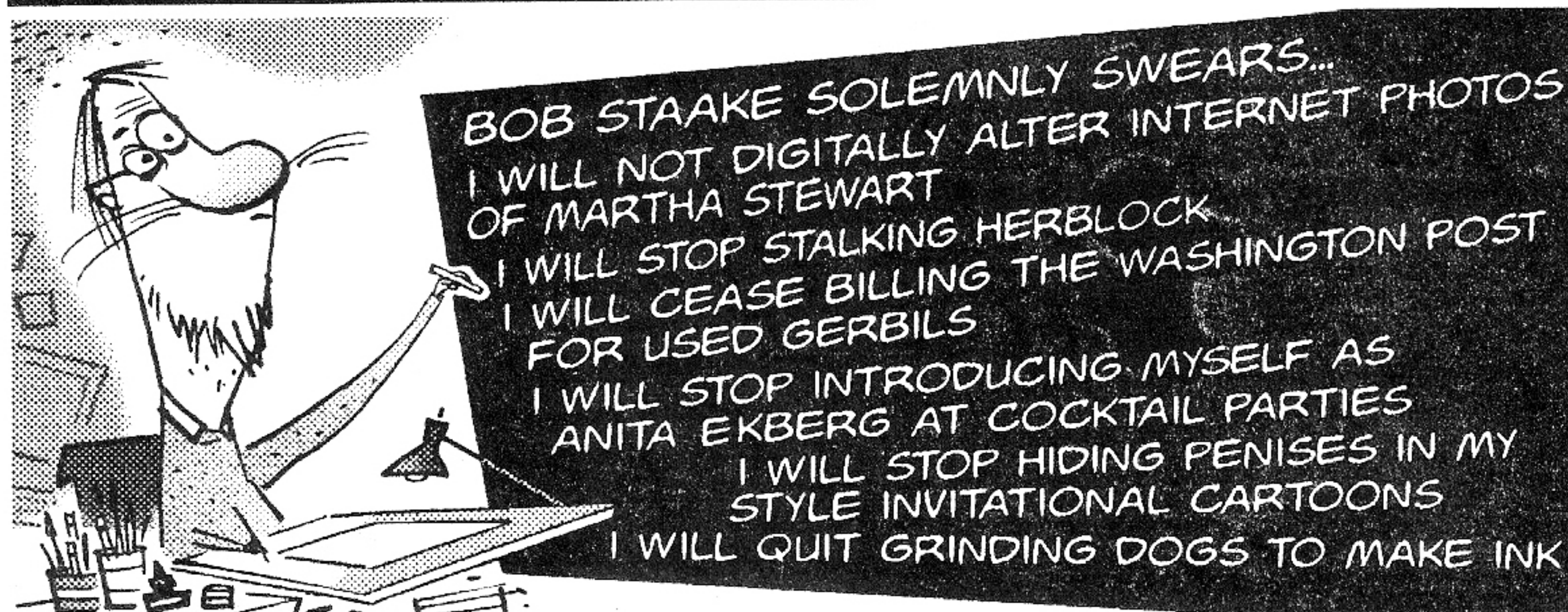
THE FIFTH AMENDMENT DOES NOT COVER BURPING.

I WILL NOT CALL MY TEACHER "HOTCAKES."

I WILL NOT FAKE SEIZURES.

I WILL NOT EAT THINGS FOR MONEY.

UNDERWEAR SHOULD BE WORN ON THE INSIDE.



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This Week's Contest was suggested by several computer geeks who discovered, on the Internet, a list of all the transgressions that Bart is apologizing for on the blackboard during the opening credits of "The Simpsons." At the top

are some examples. Your challenge is to propose similar blackboard apologies for ... yourself. The wackier the better. First-prize winner gets an Elvis wall clock. (The swiveling legs are the pendulum.) This is worth \$30.

Runners-up, as always, receive the coveted Style Invitational Loser's T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to The Style Invitational, Week 238, c/o The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, fax them to 202-334-4312 or submit them via Internet to this address: losers@access.digex.net. Internet users: Please indicate the week number in the "subject" field. Entries must be received on or before Monday, Oct. 16. Please include your address and phone number. Winners will be announced three weeks from today. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, humor or appropriateness. No purchase necessary. What kind of a name is Genser, anyway? It sounds like something that might have a head full of pus! "Oy, I got such a nasty genser on my pupick." Next week: Hemingway Ear credit. Employees of The Washington Post, and members of their immediate families, are not eligible for prizes.

REPORT FROM WEEK 235,

in which you were invited to produce fractured etymologies for common expressions. This proved tougher than we expected. There were hundreds of fabulous beginnings ("In ancient Babylonia, if a king died without an heir, the throne went to the man who could spray milk the farthest through his nose ...") but most of them just ended in painful, humorless puns ("... and people would yell, 'You slurper to the throne!'")

◆ Fourth Runner-Up: **In the rural South in the mid-20th century, bucktoothed men with bib overalls would use their trucks, usually equipped with gun racks and Astroturf, as a means to attract members of the opposite sex.** These became known as "pickup" trucks. (David Kleinbard, Silver Spring)

◆ Third Runner-Up: **The first company to produce pants in America was Dockers. But for some reason, the company called each one of its product a "pair" of pants. And so any phrase that embodies an internal contradiction is called a "Pair of Docks," which got shortened ...** (Eryk Nice, Frederick)

◆ Second Runner-Up: **When the Three Stooges were shooting, the script would often read "Mo Howard's turn." In a foreshortened form, this has metamorphosed into a term referring to something that women find disgusting and men like: "Howard Stern."** (Ed Mickolus, Dunn Loring)

◆ First Runner-Up: **Building the pyramids in Egypt was grueling and dangerous work. Among the slaves there was great solidarity; whenever one stumbled and began to fall down the steep face of the monuments, the other slaves would reach out a hand to save him. Occasionally, however, one of the slave drivers would lose his footing. Instead of reaching out a hand, a slave would nonchalantly extend a single digit as the cruel slave master went tumbling to his death. This became known as "giving the finger."** (Robin D. Grove, Columbia)

◆ *And the winner of Elvis Milk Bath:*

With the invention of sushi, the craze for eating raw fish swept through ancient Japan, and the fresher the better. Excitedly, people began holding worms or beetles in their teeth and dunking their heads into the sea, hoping to attract a live fish and consume it instantly. This was called "waiting with baited breath."

(Sue Lin Chong, Washington)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

During the Great Depression, many Midwestern farmers were so mistrustful of banks, they hid their savings under hay bales. Sometimes, a cow would find the money and eat it. When the luckless farmer later saw pieces of bills mixed in with cow chips, he would kill himself. Thus, dying became equated with the expression "cash in one's chips." (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

Shortly after the Civil War, portrait photographers, frustrated because their infant subjects could not follow instructions, discovered that feeding babies a teaspoon of bicarbonate created intestinal bubbles that made them appear to smile. Occasionally this process backfired and the child emitted a malodorous detonation before the portrait was finished. The baby felt better, but it also ceased to smile. This moment disrupted the whole process. Photographers called it "cutting the 'cheese!'" (Roger B. Stone, Gaithersburg)

In early Scotland, fasting ascetics who wished to socialize went to pubs where really dreadful food was served so they would not be tempted to break their fasts. Hence today we have

establishments known as "fast-food restaurants." (Maja Keech, New Carrollton)

Tradesmen in illiterate medieval Europe could not advertise their wares with signs, so by law they were required to attach an object to the shoulder of their tunics to attract attention; an onion for a grocer, a taxidermized mouse for an exterminator, a writ of mandamus for a lawyer, etc. This also served as a convenient index to the socioeconomic class of the person wearing such a symbol, which was good for the doctor and lawyer but not so good for the humbler tradesmen. They often objected indignantly, particularly the manure-seller, who resented the "chip on his shoulder." (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

Napoleon's chef was famous for producing gourmet meals, even during the heat of battle. The night of the battle of Marengo, for example, he produced what came to be known as Chicken Marengo simply by serving pan-fried chicken and tomato over stale pasta. His ingenuity became known as "using the old noodle." (Russ Beland, Springfield)

Next Week: **Calling the Toon**