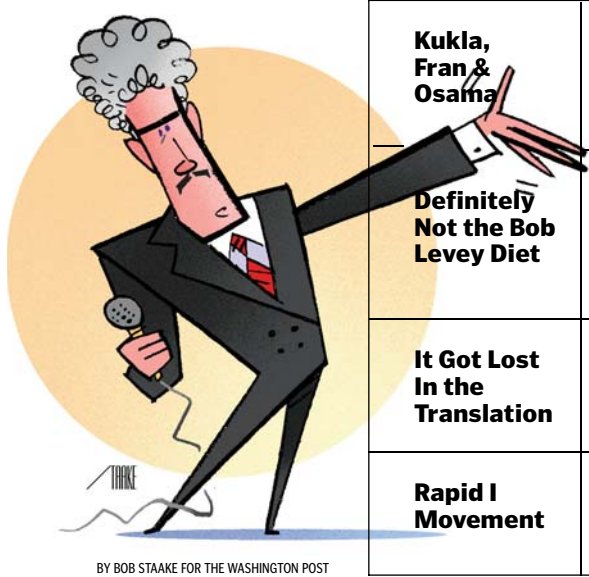


# The Style Invitational

Week CXXIII: A Bad-Ask Contest



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Kukla, Fran & Osama	'I Can't Hear You, You're Breaking Up.'	Abigail, but Not Martin, Van Buren
Definitely Not the Bob Levey Diet	Enron and Cream of Mushroom Soup	Fran Drescher And the Norwegian Parliament
It Got Lost In the Translation	Those Paper Toilet Seat Covers	Germany. Only Germany
Rapid I Movement	A Mackerel Lollipop	Velcromagnon Man

**This Week's Contest** may look familiar. It is, verbatim, the contest from two weeks ago, with one slight change: You are still on Jeopardy!, and you still have to supply questions to the above answers, but the winners will be *the least funny answers*. That's right: Your goal is to provide entries that might be submitted by the tragically humor-impaired. First-prize winner gets a Loser Pen, but not just any Loser Pen. Every year, the Style Invitational Orders 50 new pens that say "Loser" and one that says "The Czar," for the personal use of Himself. Well, this year there was a regrettable auditory miscommunication in the ordering process. And so the first-prize winner gets a nifty wooden pen that says "Bizarre."

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com). U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted due to rabid, spit-flying fanaticism. Deadline is Monday, June 10. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be 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 will be published in four weeks. 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 contest is by a lot of people.*

## Report from Week CXIX,

which was based upon the startling announcement by (Russell Beland, Springfield) that he was retiring from the contest because it had become a soul-devouring addiction. Your job was to come up with steps for a 12-step program for the recovering Invitationalaholic; or, alternately, to propose devious methods to lure him back. This week marks the longest winning entry in the contest's history.

◆ **Second Runner-Up: How to lure Russ back: Use reverse psychology. Declare him "an honorary Post employee," making him technically ineligible. Even better, put him in the Style Invitational Hall of Fame, but with an asterisk.** (Jeff Joseph, Leesburg)

◆ **First Runner-Up: How to lure Russ back: Promise him 72 virgins. Believe it or not, this actually works!** (O. bin Laden, Toledo, Ohio; Chris Doyle, Burke)

◆ **And the winner of the blue wig: How to lure Russ back: Whack him smartly in the head, right upside the hippocampus. Short-term memory disappears, à la "Memento." Then comes the 12-Step Process.**

1. Hey, what's this in the Style section? A contest based on wordplay and sarcasm! This is right up your alley! 2. A man calls you up. He calls himself The Czar. He begs you to "return." Before he hangs up, he says, "Russ, read your tattoos." You do. One says, "Don't trust your wife and all her lies." 3. You open a drawer and find a taxidermized frog wearing a tuxedo. What kind of idiot would own such a thing? 4. You begin to narrate a story about a Loser who once knew. He gave up the Style Invitational in the prime of his career. He handed himself with dental floss. 5. You are chasing a man. No, he is chasing you. "Give me that T-shirt," he screams. You escape. 6. A woman finds you. She claims to be your wife. She begs you to retire from that stupid contest. You find a tattoo that says "Don't trust your wife and all her lies." Instinct tells you to placate her, so you announce your retirement, whatever that means. 7. You walk by a woman in Denny's. She looks abused. She grabs your arm and says, "Thanks for the entries, Russ." You ask: "Do I know you?" She says, "Just call me Jenny," knowing you won't remember. 8. A man calls and tells you to write "Trust the Czar" on your body. You do. 9. A woman claiming to be your wife says, "Hey, you told me you were giving that up." You look down and see to your horror that you are writing something about human excreta. 10. You find 14 T-shirts in your dresser. They all have cartoons of people trying to kill themselves. You look for a razor blade but find only dental floss. 11. Someone has written "Trust the Czar" upside down on your buttocks. 12. Hey, what's this in the Style section? A contest based on wordplay and sarcasm! This is right up your alley! (J.D. Berry, Springfield)

◆ **Honorable Mentions:**

### HOW TO GET RUSS BACK:

**Change the first prize each week to a night on the town with Mrs. Beland.** (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

**Just print his damn manifesto already.** (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrells)

**Remind him that he has spent his career as part of a gray federal bureaucracy, and that he basically has no soul left to lose.** (Brian C. Broadus, Charlottesville)

**Build a deep pit in his front yard. Fill it with Madagascar hissing cockroaches, cover it with leaves and twigs. When Russ steps in it, wheeee! This won't lure him back, but it would be cool.** (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

**Call him up, tell him you understand why he had no choice, inquire after his wife, and then make that spousal whip-cracking noise.** (John Kammer, Herndon)

**Taper off slowly by using pseudonyms such as (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge).** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

**Walk up to Russ and say: "We need you back. You are the wittiest man alive and the contest isn't funny without you." First, though, get a few injections of Botox so you can do all that with a straight face.** (Joseph Romm, Washington)

### RUSSELL'S 9-STEP PROGRAM:

1. Channel your seditious energy elsewhere. For example, get the most pedestrian hints you can think of

printed by Heloise. ("A funnel works great to transfer liquids between containers without spilling!") (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrells)

2. Legally change your name to "Boisfeuillet Jones." Even if you backslide and send in entries, The Post can't print them. In time you will get discouraged and give up. (Fred S. Souk, Reston)

3. Find a hobby that's less obsessive-compulsive. Like stalking. (Chris Doyle, Burke)

4. Finally admit to yourself that women are lying when they say they are looking for men with a great sense of humor. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

5. Remove all pens and pencils from your bathroom. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

6. Ask your doctor to prescribe Invite-B-Gone, the humor-writing equivalent of methadone. It will probably be in suppository form. If you think this is funny, it isn't working yet. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

7. Apologize to everyone whom you have ever hurt as a result of your addiction. Yes, Bill Clinton counts. And no, we don't care if John Bobbitt was asking for it. Well, we guess you can make an exception for Hitler. (Mark Young, Washington; Bob Dalton, Arlington)

8. Associate with more well-adjusted people: Become a Trekkie. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

9. Constantly seek a higher purpose in life. Like shoplifting. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)



## TELL ME ABOUT IT

TELL ME, From F1

at 23, 28 and 33, you'll know your friend was being (slightly) over the top.

That said: Having been one, and spent time with more than a few, I don't think most 20-year-olds fully anticipate that they still have at least one more growth spurt to go, much less how intense it can be—probably because the zeros and teens suck up so much of the credit for making us all who we are.

But the twenties are when we finally get to take our parents' (and, to a lesser extent, society's) handiwork out for a test drive. On a guardrail ranch. After a few collisions with reality, most dreams need some adjusting—minor, major, immense. My reasoning is a wild generalization, and therefore suspect, but I like mine much more than your friend's. When we first leave home, we tend to be guided by what our parents hope we will be—whether we choose to embrace or reject it. With time, and distance from home—and a spectacular failure or 12—we form our lives around what we hope we can be. It's life in service of vision.

Also known as "rolling the boulder uphill." Which is why, in the end, we tend to give up and become who we are. Some people have already made this kind of peace with themselves at your age, but not many, which is why the thirties are stocked with people who gaze back at their twenties and say they had a really good time but, ugh, never again.

Carolyn:

I live comfortably, because I am careful with money. I plan, save and spend only within my means. My siblings are always in some sort of money jam, where they look to me for help. That usually means a gift, because to get them to pay it back would cause even more problems. I have finally put my foot down and told them that this particular source is now shut down. But I recently decided to buy new furniture. I planned to donate my old furniture and get a tax break on it, but my sister asked me to give it to her. I told her that was fine, if she paid me the amount of my tax break (not a lot), and made arrangements to take it away on her own. I am now getting the silent treatment

from her and my parents, because I am so "stingy." What do you think? Have I gone overboard? —Washington

Only with your expectations. Your offer to your sister is so close to being a handout that only the truly chutzpahed would have the nerve to complain.

And it doesn't hurt that the point you're making is right. Assuming she is physically and intellectually capable of taking care of herself, she is the real victim of her failure to do so, because there's no guarantee that her sponsor(s) will always be there. In the end, she's all she's got, and better she learns that now than when she's 65, so-lo and broke. In fact, the cruelest thing you could do is to keep on propping her up.

Unfortunately, for her to get this message, she needs to acknowledge, and abandon, her sense of entitlement to other people's stuff. That isn't going to happen while it remains profitable for her (the problem you're wisely addressing) and while the people who instilled it, your parents, persist in backing her up (the problem that's out of your hands, unless you can get them to see it).

Plus, she'd have to admit to an unattractive character trait, and for the easy-way-out club, of which I sense your siblings are charter members, that's like being told to go scale the moon.

In you, your family had self-discipline at no expense to them. When you revoked their access to it, you not only closed off their favorite shortcut—egads!—but also reminded them, if only implicitly, that you are the only family member who isn't an irredeemable screw-up. You had to know this would go over about as well as reminding them that you're the only family member who isn't an irredeemable screw-up.

But of the choices they left you (check their pockets for the others), you made the only responsible one, family-wide hisses notwithstanding. Hold your ground. And your tongue: Explaining yourself could sound preachy, and being right is egregious enough.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style Plus, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or [tellme@washpost.com](mailto:tellme@washpost.com) and join Carolyn's live discussion at noon Fridays at [washingtonpost.com/liveonline](http://www.washingtonpost.com/liveonline)



HAD I KNOWN THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW, I WOULD'VE LIVED THESE LAST 10 MINUTES IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY. I CAN TELL YOU THAT!

BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Next Week: Haicukoo