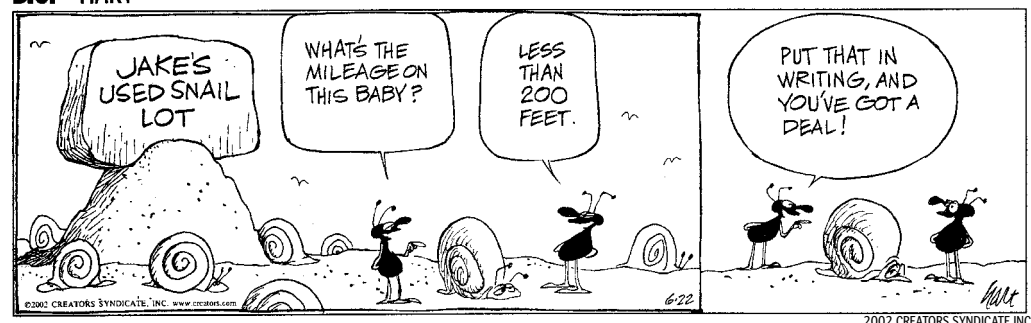


The Style Invitational

Week CXXVIII: Punch Us Again

B.C. HART



This Week's Contest is to improve the comics. Take the recent "B.C." printed above. We can all agree the last line leaves much to be desired. It would be better if it read, for example, "Forget it, it must be 20 years old, then." Your challenge is to take any comic from the daily Washington Post (or our Web site) during the next week (Monday through Saturday, starting tomorrow) and make it better by changing the contents of the final word balloon. Make sure you specify which day your cartoon appeared. First-prize winner gets an excellent "Dilbert" tie. 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. U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted due to rabid, spit-flying fanaticism. Deadline is Monday, July 15. 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 Thos. Witte of Gaithersburg.

Report from Week CXXIV, in which you were to supply the beginnings of letters to the editor that will never see print. But first, some important business. Several weeks ago, we held a contest to commemorate the announced retirement of Style Invitational superstar (Russell Beland, Springfield). We ran the contest results. And then, suddenly, with no explanation, we began receiving entries again from (Russell Beland, Springfield) as though nothing had happened. On the one hand, this is delightful news for his legions of groupies. On the other hand, he must be punished. The Czar is not a cruel man, but he is a firm man, and justice must prevail. Hence, it is hereby proclaimed that from this day hence, (Russell Beland, Springfield) shall be permitted to submit entries as usual **excepting that his next nine (9) published entries shall be publicly credited to someone else. Mr. Beland will receive no acknowledgment of these entries other than an accounting, week by week, of the number of entries remaining in his punishment bank. The banked entries will not count toward his lifetime total, for purposes of eventual induction in The Style Invitational Hall of Fame. This order is final. It cannot be questioned and is not subject to appeal. Russ has one entry published today, leaving him with eight to go.**

◆ Third Runner-Up: **Dear Editor: I'm not a bad-looking guy but I never thought anything like this would ever happen to me. My wife was out of town when the doorbell rang and two traveling aerobics instructors . . .** (Bird Waring, New York)

◆ Second Runner-Up: **Dear Ed Itor: Congratulations! You have been chosen to receive a FREE 3-day, 2-night cruise for you and the entire Itor family . . .** (Milo Sauer, Fairfax; Meg Sullivan, Potomac)

◆ First Runner-Up: **Dear Editor: I must protest your policy of referring to single mothers by their names without identifying them as whores. God has clearly . . .** (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrells)

◆ And the winner of the Battle Mountain, Nev., "Armpit of America" T-shirt:

Dear Editor: On Page A1, Column 2, Line 4, the word "reply" appeared. The line in the "e" was slightly lighter than the rest of the letter. With my magnifying glass, I have found 174 occurrences of this phenomenon since January 2001. The first was on . . . (Fil Feit, Annandale)

◆ Honorable Mentions:
Dear Editor: I'd like to share with your readers a foolproof new way I have discovered to steal newspapers . . . (Jim Wilson, Arlington)

The Washington Times said I should send my letters to you guys from now on, so . . . (Mike Genz, La Plata)

Dear Editor: First off, I would like to make it clear that I am not a crackpot. Second . . . (Kenneth A. Steadman, Washington)

Dear Editor: I wish to object, anonymously, to your policy of not printing anonymous letters. This practice . . . (Douglas Heller, Elizabeth, N.J.)

Dear Editor: This is my eighth letter on this topic, and I expect THIS one to be printed, dammit. Now . . . (Fil Feit, Annandale)

Dear Editor: Please excuse the handwriting. It is very difficult to write a letter with one hand while your pants are around your knees and . . . (Bird Waring, New York)

Dear Editor: I am writing to compliment one of your employees. I don't know her name but she is about 5 feet 6, 125 pounds with shoulder-length reddish-brown hair. She leaves every day between 5:15 and 5:35 and always carries a stainless steel thermos. Twice last month—the 7th and 21st—she wore a rust-colored blouse with a brown skirt and brown shoes and looked absolutely fetching, and . . . (Mitch Mularz, Aberdeen, Wash.)

Dear Editor: While I enjoy your food section, I regret to say I have never seen a recipe for the preparation of dog, and . . . (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Dear Editor: I would like everyone to know that my grandson, Rheinhardt A. Gaymon, has never once written a thank-you letter for any of the gifts I have sent him, and it is probably because his mother, my daughter-in-law, was raised in a stable and . . . (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrells)

Read or Edit: Get it? I scrambled the letters of "dear editor"! Ha ha. I got the idea when . . . (Greg Krakower, New York)

Dear Editor: Please excuse the rudeness of my last 50 letters. . . . (J.D. Berry, Springfield)

Dear Editor: FW:FW:FW:FW:FW . . . (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

Dear Editor: Re: proposed changes / In the fed'ral tax code / I'll express my misgivings / In the form of an ode . . . (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

Attention Tool of the Oppressors . . . (Anne Fleming, Alexandria)

Dear Editor: Reading this will probably make the average person vomit, but . . . (John Covert, Falls Church)

Dear Editor: Was it not the Roman poet Terence who said, "Quot hominus tot sententiae"? Yes, I believe it was . . . (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

Dear Editor: As a staunch opponent of free speech, I demand that my letter not be printed. (John Kammer, Herndon)

Dear Editor: So, what are you wearing? (John Kammer, Herndon)

Dear Editor: While I have been a fan of Herblock for years, I fear he has begun diminishing himself by chasing fashion. Each of his cartoons these days seems to be in a different style. . . . (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Dear Editor: As you know, today is "an especially opportune time" for me to "write a lengthy letter" to you (Today's Horoscope, July 7, 2002) and . . . (Jerry Pannullo, Kensington)

Dr. dtr: Pls frgv m f ths ltr s hrd t rd. hv nt hd vwl mvmnt n svrl ds. H h! Bt, srsl, . . . (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

Dear Editor: I am objecting for the reference in your newspaper of Washington to Mr. Saddam Hussein. Mr. Hussein should always be referred by proper title of His Most Excellent Munificent Compassionate and Benevolent Leader . . . (Stephen Dudzik, Olney)

Dear Editor: I hate when people try to exploit society by getting something for free. For example, I'm selling some used furniture at my house on 3292 Main Street, including chairs, bookshelves and a darling rolltop desk, but I would never consider . . . (Lex Friedman, Valley Village, Calif.)

Dear Editor: My name is Neal. I am 10. I have to do a report on yellow journalism. What is that? My dad said you would know. . . . (Mike Genz, La Plata)

Dear Editor: Legislating the 2.8 GPF toilet was a step in the right direction, but we must continue our efforts to eliminate unnecessary waste of our precious water resources. I speak of the "courtesy flush," an insidious practice in corporate restrooms that . . . (Greg Arnold, Herndon)

Dear Editor: TABLE OF CONTENTS.....Page 1 Intro.....4 About the Author of this letter.....6 Abstract.....9 Suggested further reading.....11 Introduction to the body of this letter (Chris Rubino, San Diego)



TELL ME ABOUT IT

TELL ME, From F1

for me has been sprinkled with hurtful remarks. In a nutshell, she says I will never amount to anything because of who my father is. Any minor personality trait I have that is like his, she points out. Throughout the seven years my husband and I have known each other, she has implied that he is too good for me. I have learned not to discuss any everyday life difficulties with her because she will attribute these "failures" to my genetics. I know within myself that none of this matters. I am educated and successful, but every experience with her makes me second-guess who I really am. It is sick. I don't know how to stop it since I have just learned to avoid confrontation. But it is getting to the point that I can't take this anymore.

—Granny's "Problem" Child

But you can take the money just fine. And that takes away: your moral high ground, your right to complain, your leverage with Granny, your spine when it comes time for confrontation, and my sympathy. Imagine if you said to her, "I am not my father. If you can't accept me as a good person in my own right, then I can't accept your money"—as you handed her the first installment toward paying her back in full. Have you imagined it? Good. Now do it. You may walk away with neither her money nor her blessing. This grudge against your dad has outlasted her daughter, at least four presidents and nine complete life cycles of John Travolta's career, so I doubt she'll let go of it lightly; comfort takes some pretty weird forms. But you'll come away with a lot more self-respect, which is the only real antidote to a venom like hers.

Carolyn: My sister is marrying an ex-boyfriend of mine. It was weird for me when they first started dating, but he and I split amicably a long time ago and he and my sister seem happy, so I am happy for them. The problem is my husband. He realizes I have a past, but he isn't relishing the thought of having to sit next to my past at Thanksgiving for the next 30 or 40 years. Plus, I think my husband may be a little

jealous because my ex was welcomed into the family instantly from the first day I brought him over, and my husband had to work a little harder to be accepted. I want to maintain my friendly relationship with my ex and stay close to my sister without causing my husband to endure any unnecessary pain. Advice?

—Virginia

Nothing you can use on him verbatim. But being blunt would cause pain of the necessary variety, so it might be worth it.

If your husband is dumping his insecurities on you—note the "if"—then your husband needs to grow up. Yes it's hard to sit next to your spouse's past and yes it wasn't fair that he had to work harder to be accepted. Eeeveryone can relate. The poor thing. Pat pat.

Now note the "but": How does he know that your ex fit in right away? I'm sure the Thanksgiving dread is all his, but it could be the acceptance envy is yours. Bringing home a family-friendly mate is the adult child's answer to having art displayed on the fridge.

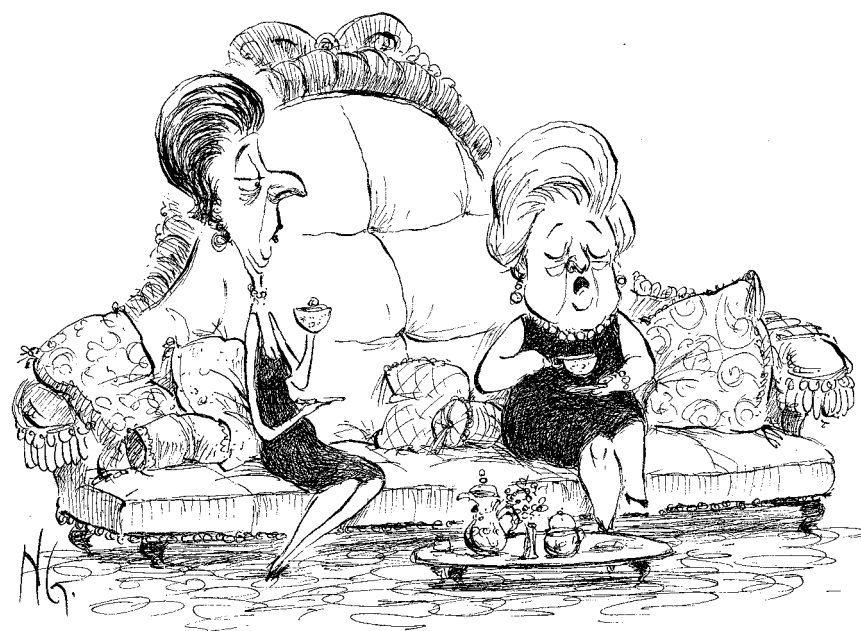
Either way—try to look up either problem under Great Calamities, and you'll come up empty. You have to go to the Fate Has a Sick Sense of Humor file. The sooner you both laugh, the better, especially since this isn't really your past, it's your sister's future. Time heals cruel jokes, too.

Dear Carolyn: I am a successful man with a good personality. I take care of myself both spiritually and physically (i.e. go to church, the gym). I think I'm an all-around good guy. Lately, however, I've been considering having cosmetic surgery to augment my physical appearance. Would that be a turnoff to women to learn that I was vain enough to do this?

—Adonis

Yes.

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



I'VE FOUND THAT IF THE CHECK IS BIG ENOUGH, I CAN BE AS HOSTILE AS I WANT.

BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Next Week: **Wit Germ**