

The Style Invitational

Week CXXXI: Cursive Writing



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

May your name and phone number turn up in Osama's black book. May you discover that the torrid online correspondence you've been having is with your daughter. May you be stranded in Central Pennsylvania and be given an emergency root canal by an Amish dentist whose drill is powered by a goat.

This Week's Contest reprises a contest we ran eight years ago. It needs updating. Come up with a new curse for this new millennium, as in the examples above.

First-prize winner gets a vintage 1953 framed copy of "The Eisenhower Prayer," an oath that Eisenhower-era bureaucrats displayed on their walls. There may be no document in the history of the Republic more violative of the principle of separation of church and state. It is worth \$40. 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, Aug. 5. 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 Mike Genz of La Plata.

Report from Week CXXVII, in which you were asked to come up with the start of a comically pretentious and self-aggrandizing book or movie review. A special thank-you to Mark Carson of Rockville, who pointed out that we needed to look no further than our own op-ed pages, and this recent gem from columnist Charles Krauthammer:

"As the All-Star Game approaches, the players' union is about to set a date for a strike. Barry Bonds is wrong. Baseball will not survive it. How do I know? Because if the players do strike, they may one day come back. But I will not. And if baseball loses me, there will be no one else left."

The Sisyphean ordeal of (Russell Beland, Springfield) continues this week. He has two entries published under other people's names, leaving him six more in his punishment bank.

◆ **Third Runner-Up:** On the set of "The Color Purple," I asked, "Steve, will you ever make a film that truly understands mankind's perverse desire to deprive himself of natural justice?" In the ensuing years this question has preoccupied the director to the point where it completely dominates his latest film . . . (Mark Young, Washington)

◆ **Second Runner-Up:** I found this film best enjoyed in its original Swedish, but with Italian subtitles . . . (Jeremy Fisher, Manchester, Mass.)

◆ **First Runner-Up:** After returning home from a conference celebrating the best and brightest recent graduates of Harvard Law School, where about 17 men, conservatively speaking, confided to me that I bear an uncanny resemblance to the protagonist in the movie "Erin Brockovich," I was compelled to see the film. And . . . (Judy Miller, Poolesville)

◆ And the winner of the Spam can piggy bank: It occurred to us the other eve whilst dozing at a local *cinestspielhaus's* airing of "Night of the Living Dead" that we could celebrate the resurrection of the deceased only if those revived emanated from the class epitomized by Mr. Noel Coward, the Lunts and Barrymores, M. Jean Cocteau, Ms. Dottie Parker . . . (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

◆ **Honorable Mentions:** It was my turn to recommend a literary work to the Single Mothers' Intensive Reading Circle (SMIRC), and I was certain I had found the perfect book to describe our lives: "Invisible Man." Ha! It turned out to be just another excuse for a man to whine about his problems . . . (Jennifer L. Nelson, Washington)

"Spider-Man" disappointed me, though it seemed to amuse the audience that accompanied me to the theater; they appeared to enjoy the comic antics and whatnot . . . (Rob Carey, Dublin)

With great pride I unequivocally recommend "The Bible," a wonderful historic book, the recent success of which may well be due to my positive review of the Viking paperback edition three years ago in this space . . . (Tony Hope, Washington)

While "Platoon" attempts to capture American soldiers' experiences in Vietnam, those of us who were really there, not holed up in Saigon sipping Kahlua with bar girls in silk dresses while the rest of us waded through paddies, only to get home to find . . . (Robert Gruner, Palo Alto, Calif.)

A biscotti, perhaps. But an entire meal

with Andre? Oh, no, my dears. No, no, no, no. (Jonathan Paul, Garrett Park)

Since Professor Stephen Hawking had described me as the smartest man he has ever met, I am delighted that this review of his brilliant new book allows me to return the favor . . . (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Having penned a few plays myself, I understand how difficult it is to be both original and entertaining. Nonetheless, the extent of Mr. Shakespeare's plagiarism is shocking . . . (Joseph Romm, Washington)

I don't want to hear anymore about what a great novel "Crime and Punishment" is. While I myself would never deign to read mystery novels, it was readily apparent early on even to me that Raskolnikov was the killer. I couldn't be bothered to read any further, and . . . (Roy Ashley, Washington)

As noted in my previous reviews of works by Sophocles and Euripides, sequels inevitably repeat the same tired themes of the original, introduce unbelievable plot contrivances, and suffer from multiple inconsistencies. Sadly, the New Testament is no exception . . . (Joseph Romm, Washington)

Next Week: Comic Endings

Richard's Poor Almanac • by Richard Thompson

HERE ARE JUST SOME OF THE FOLKS WHO WANT TONY WILLIAMS ON THE MAYORAL PRIMARY BALLOT



WON'T YOU JOIN THEM? DO IT NOW BEFORE IT'S TOO LA—JUST HURRY, OK? THERE'S \$1.4 MILLION IN DEMOCRATIC FUNDS RIDING ON IT.

YOUR SIGNATURE HERE

Please mail to—the Committee to Re-Elect the Mayor, Suite 140A-19, Incompetency Building, 1270 J St. NW, Washington DC, 20036-1432.

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Yech! A Touching Story

A prominent state official whose sudden retirement was prompted by a desire to spend more time with his wife and grandchildren, as well as by the public discovery that he had paid off an employee who accused him of sexual harassment, made a public confession:

It was true that he had committed the crime of failing to keep up with etiquette changes.

"I don't blame anyone for my troubles. Most of them I brought upon myself," he said. "But times have changed, and what was accepted in the era in which I was raised is strictly off limits today. I didn't change with the time, and if I have offended anyone I am truly sorry and I apologize."

A reader has asked Miss Manners for a clarification of the etiquette involved: "I was born in the early 1970s," she writes, "and as a result, I have no experience with the Bad Old Days before feminism. Nonetheless, my guess is that sexual harassment was never considered correct or polite behavior, at least not in our country's short history. And yet every time a public figure admits to having behaved inappropriately toward a woman, he claims that such behavior used to be perfectly acceptable. (His only crime is to be too old-fashioned!)"

"Putting aside the weak nonapology, have the rules really changed? What era did this man grow up in, exactly, when trapping and assaulting women was accepted? It may not have been illegal, at least in a practical sense, but surely this is a point on which etiquette has not wavered over the years. Please reassure me."

Miss Manners can reassure her that etiquette did not previously countenance forcing attentions on ladies, and then suddenly discover that there may be something improper about it but failed to get the word out to those it had considered perfect gentlemen by its earlier standard.

As the reader supposes, it is, rather, the law that long ignored this behavior that it has lately come to condemn.

A lawmaker who wishes to apologize for not keeping up with the times in regard to this issue should apologize for ignorance of the law.

However, the person in question here denies having harassed his accuser (while admitting to having paid her \$100,000 in an out-of-court settlement) and invokes a practice that instead of being old-fashioned is what is called New Age.

He describes himself as "huggy."

This refers to the pop psychology notion that

hugging a stranger or acquaintance confers a beneficence on that person. Beginning in the encounter group movement, it spread into society to the point where even churchgoers may be instructed to hug whoever happens to be sitting in the next seat.

Miss Manners has always been amazed that the notion that it was a good thing to grab people and hug them without their permission arose at about the same time that the law discovered that it was a bad thing to grab people without their permission.

Surely the desirability of being in someone's arms depends on whose arms they are, and being deprived of choice is an indignity whether the intent is romance or comfort—obtaining a favor or conferring one. In either case, grabbing people has always been condemned by etiquette and always will be.

Dear Miss Manners:

I let a friend read a complaint letter I had just composed, without asking her beforehand if she wanted to. After fitting it into my online chat screen and sending it to her, I realized it took up a lot of space, and said, "Oh, that was long." She agreed, saying it was "good, but long."

I felt offended that she agreed with me. Was my taking offense justified?

Later, I wrote an e-mail telling her I felt hurt and thought it was rude for her to offer her opinion without being asked. I felt I had committed a social faux pas. What should I have done?

What you should do right now is to get a grip on yourself. When you start complaining about your friends who agree with you, Miss Manners is afraid that you are moving from being an outraged consumer or concerned citizen to full-fledged crank.

Your forwarding your letter to your friend who had not requested it implied that you wished her opinion. Furthermore, her reply was tactful, possibly meaning that the quality justified the length. So the second thing you should do now is apologize.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com, or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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TODAY'S HOROSCOPE | Sydney Omarr

ARIES (March 21-April 19) Be discreet, do not tell all. Don't confide or confess. Delve into unknown areas. Battle fear, doubt and superstition. Taurus, Leo and Scorpio play roles.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Many of your fondest hopes, desires will be fulfilled. You exude personality and sex appeal. Read, write and get thoughts on paper. Flirtation is serious. Gemini involved.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) Emphasis on where you live and with whom. Look beyond the immediate; perceive potential. Offer to travel is forthcoming; this could mean journey to foreign land.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) Your contributions will be acknowledged. You gain added recognition and could

be on way to fame, fortune. Define terms, get promises in writing. Don't fall victim to self-deception.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) You will have responsibility of investing other people's money. Maintain aura of exclusivity; you could be regarded as a "mysterious figure." Encourage that concept. Capricorn involved.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) Look beyond the immediate. Be aware of legal rights, permissions. Spotlight on partnership, marriage. Your words could be quoted in faraway places. Aries plays outstanding role.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) Do your work in innovative manner. What begins as routine could transformed into creative adventure. Adhere to your own style. Do not follow others. Leo figures prominently.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) Focus on creativity, challenge and a variety of experiences. You emit vibrations of sensuality, sex appeal. Protect self in emotional clinches. Cancer native represented.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) You will be involved with real estate, sale or purchase of property. Highlight humor and intelligence. Older family member has a say; you have right to disagree.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) Short trip will involve temperamental relative. You beat the odds and do what many have considered impossible. Taurus, Libra and Scorpio natives play exciting role.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) Income potential featured. At the track, choose fifth post position in fifth race.

Relationship grows hot and heavy; if you are not serious, move on! Sagittarius involved.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) Be near water if possible. Domestic adjustment could include marital status, possible change of residence. Highlight diplomacy. Be generous but not extravagant. Libra figures prominently.

IF JULY 28 IS YOUR BIRTHDAY: You are independent, an original thinker. Although you have been hurt, you are always willing to give romance another chance. Your favorite colors almost always include white and yellow. Leo, Aquarius persons play major roles in your life, could have these letters in names: A, S, J. During August, you will be active in the mantic arts, including astrology. Social life accelerates in September.

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