

The Style Invitational

Week CLII: Asterisky Business



Dr. Smith: My son passed calculus* but he wasn't at all happy about it.

Dr. Jones: Why not?

Dr. Smith: It was the size of a pea!

Dr. Jones: Hahahaha.

(*In medicine, a calculus is a kidney stone.)

Why did the recently crowned Miss Argentina blush? Because she was embarazada!*

(*In Spanish, embarazada means pregnant.)

What sort of headgear might a cartoon character wear if you wanted to show that he got a sudden, brilliant idea? An impulse turban!*

(*In mechanics, an "impulse turbine" is a kind of electrical generator.)

This Week's Contest: Write a joke with a punch line depending on knowledge so esoteric that it requires an asterisked explanation. The best entries will be the ones in which, once explained, the joke is actually pretty funny. First-prize winner gets a *huge* bra and panties, promotional materials from the dreadful movie "Big Momma's House."

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. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 30. 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 Chris Doyle of Forsyth, Mo.

Report from Week CXLVIII, in which you were asked to create homophones of existing words and define them:

- ◆ **Third Runner-Up: Jestation:** *That pregnant pause between joke and punch line.* (Max Sudol, Richmond, Australia)
- ◆ **Second Runner-Up: Masseuss:** *A Lorax who rubs your thorax.* (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- ◆ **First Runner-Up: Amfibian:** *A frog who, after you kiss him, remains a frog.* (Milo Sauer, Fairfax)
- ◆ **And the winner of the genuine photocopy of "John Train's Most Remarkable Names": Auntacid:** *Saliva on a tissue used to wipe your face.* (Michael D. Levy, Silver Spring)

◆ **Honorable Mentions:**

Supersize: *To expand the boundaries of your class action lawsuit.* (Jerome Uher, New York)

Siouxshi: *Bison tartare.* (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Crocodial: *Describing the lizardlike business of telemarketing.* (Jane Freedman, Wellesley, Mass.; Kevin Bruns, Potomac)

Pi-eyed: *3.1415962653 sheets to the wind.* (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Reapublican: *Someone who is against government handouts, except for crop subsidies.* (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

Prostitoot: *A little beep to get her to look your way.* (Kyle Bonney, Fairfax)

Unaverse: *Ted Kaczynski's cell.* (Kyle Bonney, Fairfax)

Schottenfreude: *Taking malicious satisfaction in the misfortune of the employer who fired you.* (Jim Parisi, Washington)

Chow Maine: *General Tso's Lobster.* (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Decolletaj: *The world's most breathtaking sight.* (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Guynecology: *The study of the female reproductive system via certain Web sites.* (Bruce Carlson, Alexandria)

Porenography: *Extreme close-ups on those same Web sites.* (Nick Dierman, San Francisco)

Phyllosophy: *An argument so thin as to be nearly transparent.* (Craig DuBose, Charlottesville)

Pillgrimage: *A junkie's perpetual quest.* (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

Phallusy: *The contention that size doesn't matter.* (Joe Kobylski, Hyattsville)

Wrapture: *The feeling one gets when one has completed all Christmas shopping by Thanksgiving.* (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)

Next Week: **What-Do-They-Doodads**

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Hurt Till It Gives

Head from your favorite charity lately?

Miss Manners bets you have. And from some that aren't such favorites.

What about the people from whom you have requested donations to your favorite charity? Haven't heard from them? Or perhaps you have heard an earful instead of a pledge.

The combination of laudatory generosity and a lousy economy have produced a society in which people who have enough to live on are always asking one another for money. And that's not even counting the ones who are directing their wedding guests to pay their mortgages or the fund-drive executives who are discovered to believe that charity should end up at home. Miss Manners means the people who want to help others.

The entire enterprise has come to be characterized by good intentions and bad manners. Schooled in professional fundraising techniques, kindly people learn to embarrass and harass friends and strangers alike. Inundated with these ploys from friends and strangers, other kindly people turn resentful and sometimes rude.

Miss Manners believes that everyone involved would benefit by kicking in with a sizable amount of politeness.

She suspects that this might even produce greater benefits for the people on whose behalf charity is conducted.

Perhaps not; Miss Manners does not pretend to be yet another expert in extracting donations, and is personally incapable of asking anyone for money. If effectiveness were the only standard that fundraising need consider, then the charitably inclined should employ the traditional way of making potential donors reach for their wallets, which is to corner them in a dark alley and intone the traditional pitch: "Stick 'em up."

Nevertheless, she cannot help thinking that strategies that are giving good works a bad name are ultimately self-defeating. Even if they fork over at the time, in the long run people turn callous under continual attack from those who embarrass them by insinuating that they look cheap if they don't give or give more; will be socially handicapped if they don't buy tickets to charity events; and are obviously callous if they don't succumb to this particular appeal.

Even the most carefully polite fundraisers are reporting being snapped at by those who don't hang up on them first. "We get responses such as 'Don't you have anything better to do?' or 'Some of us have to work for our money,' as well as a few things a Gentle Reader should not mention," reports a G.R. "We understand when someone is not able or willing to give money. However, what

we don't understand is the unkind remarks thrown back at us."

Miss Manners wishes to make contributions to both the fundraisers and potential fund-givers.

For those who ask:

Difficult as this is, try to remember that it is not your money. You have no claim on it; you have no authority to say how it should be spent. You should not even know how much money people have (people who have done research on this naturally want to show off, but it is a mistake), and you cannot guess the extent of their obligations. Even when there is a past history of giving, income and expenses could fluctuate widely from one time to the next.

All you can hope to do is to interest them in your charity and tell them how the money translates into results. Everything short of disaster is being called a "good cause"; what is meaningful is what a specific contribution will help accomplish.

Say thank you. Reminding people how much they gave last year and saying that you expect more this year does not qualify as thanks.

For those who are asked: You can say, "No, thank you."

Dear Miss Manners:

Over a long period of time I have received scattered invitations to family and friends' weddings and bar mitzvahs that state BLACK TIE! I happen not to own a tuxedo, and renting one is not inexpensive. I would like to attend most of these affairs but, since I do not have a tuxedo, I have opted not to attend.

Is there an appropriate way to decline an invitation to a black-tie affair? Or, better still, is there a way to attend a black-tie affair without wearing a tuxedo and without insulting the family or friend? I never know what to do and I am losing the opportunity to share the day.

Then rent or buy the proper clothes.

If this is truly a financial hardship, Miss Manners is sure that your friends would rather see you wearing a plain dark suit than not see you at all. Just don't let her and them find out that you had no trouble investing in tennis or ski clothes that you only wear a few times a year.

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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Richard Thompson is away. Richard's Poor Almanac will resume when he returns.

TELL ME ABOUT IT

TELL ME, *From F1*

I'm also skeptical, though, that your friends/co-workers/bystanders all truly believe you should be out for blood. If anything, the frenzy is theirs, and your mixed feelings are the chum. There's love and support in there for you, I'm sure, as well as the fact that it's easier for people to run your life than it is their own.

But there's also a stiff shot of human frailty. People like to feel as if they know things, and some can't resist the cheap power trip they get from lobbing an I-told-you-so—especially at someone who clearly doesn't have it all figured out.

They should resist, obviously. Your letter grazed two of the reasons: that they make you feel stupid for liking the guy in the first place, and also protective of him, since you still like him to some degree.

There's a third, though, that should help to improve your mood. Knowledge, with a capital E, requires a grasp of what you do and don't know. By admitting you still have stuff to sort out, you're showing unusual strength.

Outsiders with retroactive spite for the ex are likewise revealing their weakness, at least logically: They can't fully know what went on between you guys. Not unless two and a half years of listening went into these opinions, and if that were the

case, there'd likely be some nuance to them.

Understanding this is your internal defense. Keep reminding yourself: "They can't know what happened, they just want to, because they want to be part of my life." In external form: "It's more complex than that, but thanks."

Dear Carolyn:

I know someone who recently had a miscarriage. I am not that close to her, but I do see her quite often.

After receiving the news from the husband I expressed my condolences sincerely, but I am feeling a little awkward with the etiquette when I next see his wife. What would be appropriate, and what if it happens to someone who is closer to me in the future?

Edmonton, Alberta

Trust the instinct that produced your sincere condolences. It was a death in the family. Regardless of how close you are, you express your sorrow, anticipate and respect the parents' grief, and follow their lead from there.

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

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

North-South vulnerable

NORTH
 ♠ A K 9 3
 ♥ Q 7 5
 ♦ 7 6 4
 ♣ A J 10

EAST
 ♠ Q 7 5 4 2
 ♥ 10 3
 ♦ Q 10 2
 ♣ 7 5 3

SOUTH (D)
 ♠ J 10
 ♥ A K 1 8 6 4 2
 ♦ K
 ♣ Q 6 4

The bidding:

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|----------|-------|------|
| 1♥ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 3♥ | Pass | 4♣ | Pass |
| 4♥ | Pass | 5♥ | Pass |
| 6♥ | All Pass | | |

Opening lead: ♦ A

Rose, the member of my club whose tact and generosity toward partners and opponents alike is admirable, is one sharp lady. She told me she always sends checks to her five grandchildren for Christmas but had grown distressed at never getting any thank-you notes.

"This year it was different," Rose said. "All five of them came over to thank me."

"They must be growing more mature," I remarked.

"This year," Rose said, smiling, "I didn't sign the checks."

Rose plays the players in our game as well as she plays her grandchildren. I watched her declare today's slam. (Cover the East-West cards to see if you can play as well.)

North's raise to five hearts asked South to bid slam unless she had two fast losers in diamonds, the on-

ly unbid suit, and Rose obliged.

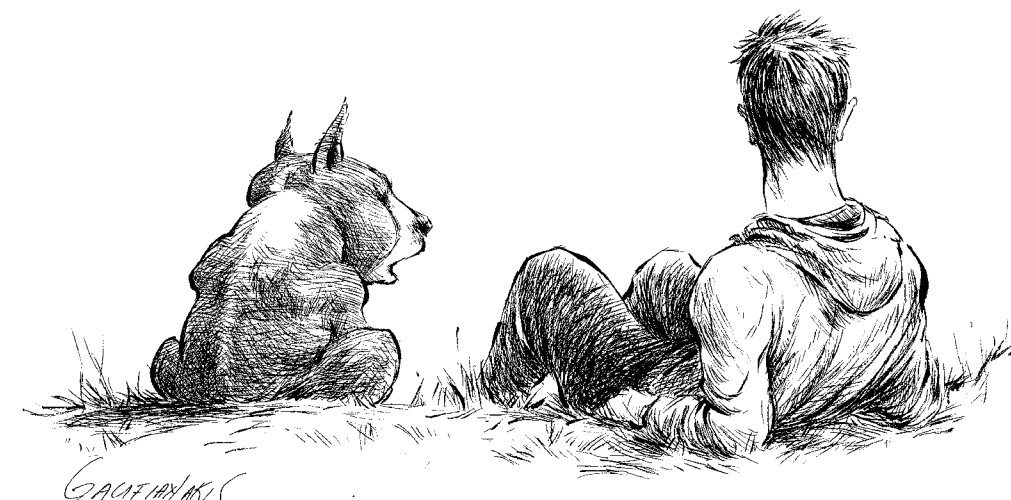
West, a good player, cashed the ace of diamonds and shifted to the nine of clubs. Should declarer risk the club finesse or try instead for four spade tricks?

Rose thought briefly and played dummy's 10. When East followed low, it was all over. Rose drew trumps and took another club finesse for 12 tricks.

"Well done," I said.

Rose inferred that West had the king of clubs. If East had the king, a club shift by West wouldn't be vital. East would either get the king eventually, or he wouldn't. But if East had the queen of clubs, a club shift by West from a worthless holding might give South an easy time by trapping the queen: South's hand could have been J 10 2, A K J 8 6 4 2, K, K 4.

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JUST BECAUSE I'M BLIND TO THE COMPLEXITIES, PRESUMPTUOUS AND A DOG, DOESN'T MEAN I'M NOT RIGHT ABOUT YOUR EX-GIRLFRIEND.

BY NICK GALATIANS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST