

## The Style Invitational

### Week 579: Another Brilliant Contest! Do Enter!



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

**Almost by chance, David envied Fabio's great heinie; I just kinda like mushy, normal ones. Honestly, I just keep licking my new open pustules.**

**This week's contest**, suggested by Russell Beland of Springfield, is one of those rare contest ideas that seem so obvious that it's amazing we haven't run it in any of the previous 578 weeks. But if anyone would know, it would be Russ, who spends way more time thinking about this contest than we do. Write us a sentence or phrase consisting of words beginning with consecutive letters of the alphabet, in the A-to-Z direction.

First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins a Sharper Image "Aqua Frame," a plastic box in which some plastic fish "swim" around with aid of magnets. The box describes it as "dynamic entertainment" that offers "all the fun of an aquarium with none of the hassle." Kind of how paying your yard and painting it green delivers all the fun of a lawn with none of the hassle.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Oct. 18. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are

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 Nov. 7. 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. The Aqua Frame was donated by Kevin Mellema of Falls Church.

**Postscript to Report from Week 574:** Last week's brilliant First Runner-Up entry, for practical jokes that would backfire, was written by a celebrity—the fabulously dark-witted Jack Handey of "Deep Thoughts" fame (we once ran a contest to imitate his work). Unfortunately, it was not submitted by the fabulous Mr. Handey.

**Report from Week 575**, in which we solicited ideas for the new Loser T-Shirt for runners-up, to be drawn by Esteemed Cartoonist Bob Staake based on the idea of his choice. This year's model gets away from the botched-suicide-attempt theme of the past several Loser T-Shirts. The previous versions have prompted at least one regular Loser, a doctor, to alter the artwork before being seen wearing them, and successful Loser Jean Sorensen of Herndon to implore the Empress to, for once, instead make the new shirt "something witty, clever, dare I say it, subtle." Hey, Jean, even Ted Williams didn't bat .667.

#### Design for the front:

◆ **Third runner-up, winner of the current Loser shirt, since she doesn't have one yet, so what does it matter: Culpeper guy aiming a shotgun at the mosquito on his big toe.** (Maggie Lawrence, Culpeper, Va.)

◆ **Second runner-up, winner of a new Loser shirt, since he already has won 54 of the others: Graduates in caps and gowns are standing in line to receive diplomas. The Loser, in the center, is being handed a roll of toilet paper.** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

◆ **First runner-up, winner of an old Loser shirt, since he refuses to wear his previous 69 shirts in public anyway: A guy in a suit of armor trying to go through airport security.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **And the winner of Bob Staake's original drawing for this T-shirt (but not the shirt—see, she didn't lose!):** (Sarah W. Gaymon, Gambrells)



DESIGN BY SARAH W. GAYMON, GAMBRILLS

#### Slogan for the back:

◆ **Second runner-up: Surely I Jested** (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, W. Va.)

◆ **First runner-up: If You Can Read This, I Came Close** (Russell Beland)

◆ **And the slogan for the new shirt, the winner of the Inker: The Style Invitational: Under New Mismanagement** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills; Russell Beland, Springfield)

#### Honorable Mentions:

◆ **Half the Wit That's Fit to Print** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

◆ **Attach Monkey Here** (Russell Beland)

◆ **If You Don't Get It, You've Got Company** (Brendan Beary)

◆ **Think This Is Bad, You Should See What the Winner Got!** (Art Grinath)

◆ **If You Can't See My Mirrors, I Can't See You** (Marty McCullen)

◆ **Open Other Side** (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

◆ **Wide Right Turns** (Marty McCullen)

◆ **They're With Stupid (with arrows pointing all different ways)** (Russell Beland)

◆ **Registered Textual Offender** (Tom Witte)

◆ **I couldn't make number one or number two for the whole week!** (Russell Beland)

◆ **If You Can Read This, I Put My Shirt on Backward Again** (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

◆ **The Style Invitational: Gone With the Weekend** (Mel Loftus, Holmen, Wis.)

◆ **I Slept With the Empress for This?** (Art Grinath)

◆ **And Last: Curses, Doyleed Again!** (Russell Beland)

Next Week: **Well, Excuuuuse Us! or Flaw Exercises**

## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### Uh, Gee, Thanks

Say something nice; make someone feel bad. Miss Manners would have thought this a difficult combination to pull off. Insults are easy and, she regrets to say, plentiful. There is general agreement about what constitutes a negative attribute, and the insulter has only to name it. As reinforcement, there is the sneer with which insults are delivered. But compliments that leave their targets miffed and their givers bewildered are also plentiful. They just require a bit more thoughtfulness.

Guessing about the situation being admired is almost a sure method:

"I see you're pregnant—congratulations!"

"What an adorable child. You must be the proud grandfather."

"Is that your girlfriend?"

"I bet you're the smartest one in your class."

"You must be making a fortune to afford that."

Almost as effective is asking:

"Your hair is such a beautiful color. Is it dyed?"

"Where'd you get that darling baby? He doesn't look anything like you."

"Wow, your performance was amazing. Do they check for steroids?"

"I bet all the boys are after you—so how come you're not married yet?"

Other comments that are intended to pass for compliments backfire because they are based on erroneous ideas of shared assumptions.

Gentlemen have had a hard time getting over the notion that all ladies liked to be praised for their looks and clothes, by anyone and under any circumstances. Their wives and daughters appreciate this, so why do ladies at work—or strangers on the street—take offense at being similarly appraised, so long as the judgment is favorable?

Ladies have a hard time believing that other ladies do not want their weight favorably appraised. Being told that they have lost weight is no delight for people who have illnesses they don't care to discuss, thought they looked all right before or just don't like the idea of being monitored.

Both genders have trouble believing that there is anyone over the age of 18 who is not flattered to be taken for someone younger, however unbelievably. Professionals are told they look too young to hold their jobs, parents that they are too young to have children of the age that they clearly do, partners that one of them is too young for

the other, and the elderly that they couldn't possibly be the age they claim.

Another general belief is that everyone is proud of his or her shopping skills and financial resources, so that approving comments on possessions are always in order, and may be followed by "Where'd you get that?" and "How much was it?"

Finally, there is the assumption that it is satisfying to arouse envy. This accounts for the number of people who believe that it is a compliment to mention good fortune and then say, "and I hate you."

All these people plead that they are "just trying to be nice," which is what Miss Manners keeps urging them to do. Perhaps she forgot to specify that it should be the kind of niceness that does not leave others feeling worse.

#### Dear Miss Manners:

**On only a few days' notice, I was married in February to a wonderful woman. Having not had time to properly invite friends and family to our nuptials, and since we already had been living together for 14 years, we didn't expect to receive gifts.**

**Nevertheless, we did receive many wonderful cards and calls of congratulations, and a few relatives did send us thoughtful gifts. Of course we promptly wrote them thank-you notes and telephoned them to show our sincere appreciation. Unfortunately, a decision by the California Supreme Court voided our marriage, along with the marriages of approximately 4,000 other same-gender couples.**

**What is the proper etiquette with respect to keeping or returning these special gifts now that the court has forced us to untie the knot?**

Wedding presents may be properly accepted during the couple's engagement, and need only be returned if they no longer wish to be married. You have, after all, met Miss Manners's basic and non-negotiable requirement: You wrote thank-you letters.

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

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## DEAR ABBY

#### Dear Abby:

**I'm writing in response to "Curly in Chesterfield, Mo.," who asked for guidelines on tipping hairdressers who rent their stations and keep 100 percent of the fees they charge. "Curly" was of the opinion that tipping is only for people who work on commission.**

**You correctly advised her to ask her hairdresser if tips are accepted—and advised her that the usual amount is 15 to 20 percent of the bill.**

**Speaking as a hairstylist for the last 20 years, I cannot believe the number of people who don't know how to tip. Whether the stylist is an owner, manager or just a hairstylist, that person is still giving the customer a service. Many of my clients give more than that, and some still give nothing.**

**People should remember that when they give a tip, they are saying, "Thank you."**

*Stylist in Wisconsin*

Not everyone agrees. Read on:

#### Dear Abby:

**I disagree with your reply to "Curly." My hairdresser rents her station from the salon owner. She sets her own prices and hours. I typically pay her \$100 for a cut, style and highlights, which takes her about 2 1/2 hours. The woman makes more per hour than I do, at a business she basically owns! I only tip people who work for someone and earn minimum wage. I don't tip restaurant owners, and they don't expect it. They want my return business.**

*Rene in San Pedro*

And that's your privilege. Read on:

#### Dear Abby:

**I am a self-employed hairstylist, and I'd like to respond to "Curly." We may take home 100 percent of our fees, but after we pay for rent, supplies, taxes and the salary of our shampoo girls, we keep only about 50 percent of what we make. I would love not to depend on tips, but in**

**the town where I live, hairstylists can't command large fees. I am very grateful for my clients' generosity.**

*M. in Virginia*

You are not the only person who wanted to explain the financial facts of life regarding the beauty business. Read on:

#### Dear Abby:

**Thank you so much for your response to "Curly."**

**Customers think that because we pay rent, we pocket all our income. Wrong! People don't realize that on top of the rent we pay, we must also purchase all of our own tools, chemicals and products. Our scissors alone cost at least \$150—most of the time more. When they need sharpening, it costs \$25.**

**We have no benefits. We must pay for 100 percent of our insurance. If our kids get sick and we can't work—we don't get paid. We are considered self-employed, so we pay all of our Social Security. (When you are employed by someone else, the employer pays half.)**

**When a customer stands us up, we are not only out the money, but we are also out the time we allocated for that customer.**

**It is amazing to me how those who have the most money are the stingiest tippers—and the people who have little are so generous!**

**I feel that when you treat customers with love and cater to their needs, a tip is their response to how well we are doing our job.**

*Miss Tress in Kankakee, Ill.*

And so do I.

*Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.*

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## TODAY'S HOROSCOPE

Jeraldine Saunders

#### Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22)

The exhilarating effect of making new contacts brightens your world and your charm is still at a peak. You and a partner can work together to make dynamic changes a reality and improve conditions close to home.

#### Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21)

Take some time out for delightful domestic bliss while congenial stars are still shining. Projects close to home might require all your energy and attention. Get small tasks done and let the big ones wait.

#### Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

The carousel of fun and excitement is slowing to a stop but you may have made memories that you can treasure for months to come. It is time to act on recently formed objectives and reinforce recently formed friendships.

#### Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Preserve the feeling of open-mindedness in the air by adopting a more tolerant viewpoint and sticking to your guns. Make some promises to yourself about being fair and generous to others in the week to come.

#### Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

You may need to restrain your freewheeling, happy-go-lucky style in the week ahead, so enjoy yourself today and kick up your heels. You are likely to be at the

right place at the right time to score points where your objectives are concerned.

#### Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

Your world revolves around significant others, so put some extra effort into pleasing your partner. A little TLC will work wonders and bring the two of you closer. A little frivolous spending may be just what the doctor ordered to brighten your day.

#### Aries (March 21-April 19)

The seeds of unrest could prod you to jump into new activity without proper caution. Go ahead and make necessary changes to ensure things run more smoothly, but put major projects on the back burner for careful consideration.

#### Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Where love and social affairs are concerned it is best to "make hay while the sun shines" and get out for some fun. Rest and relaxation now will prepare you for a grueling and tense week ahead.

#### Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Those in your immediate circle could be filled with enthusiasm and brimming with optimism for the future. It is easy for you to reach into your private bag of tricks and make plans a reality, as you are just the person to do the necessary research.

#### Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Others could have a change of

heart or otherwise upset your apple cart. You are fascinated by the unusual, so spur-of-the-moment plans may be attractive. Have a good time but avoid beginning new relationships unless you are looking for short-lived fun.

#### Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)

A few surprises could be in store for you. New friends and entertainments could take center stage. Fascinating moments with a new someone could set an exhilarating mood and get you out of your rut today.

#### Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

It is a good time to experiment and try on new looks and fresh ideas. Enthusiastic friends can brighten the domestic scene and provide thought-provoking perspectives. Learn progressive techniques to make your workload easier.

#### IF OCT. 10 IS YOUR BIRTHDAY:

There's nothing in the stars to hold you back this coming year. Jupiter, planet of abundance and blessings, will be in your sector of the zodiac and shower you with opportunities to improve your life from late December through March. You will be feeling younger than ever as spring arrives, when you should reach a long-term period of peace and prosperity and can successfully seek your dreams. Help from the planet Neptune is likely to aid your quest for romantic dreams all summer long.

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