



CAROLYN HAX

Many angles on single parenting

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn:

I am 33, single and about one iota of certainty away from deciding to get artificially inseminated. The thing really stopping me is that no one in my life supports this decision. Reasons range from "you're too young to give up on finding a husband" to "you're too busy to raise a child alone." I have thought about this for a long time and feel relatively sure, but the fact that everyone who loves me is so against it really bugs me. Can you help me separate the valid dissent from the less valid stuff?

New Jersey

All you can do is take each dissenting opinion, see if you have an answer that isn't a rationalization, then make your best decision from there. It's very difficult for any of us to spot our own rationalizations, because we're the ones we're trying to snow, which usually makes our efforts particularly effective — but it can be done. In this case, look for specific (vs. general) counterarguments. "You're too busy," they say — so, what's your response? Is it specific — "I spend two hours in the gym when I can easily quit after 45 minutes, or work out with videos at home"? Or is it "People always find time when they need to"? Is it, "I can cut my two-hour commute to 30 minutes if I move to the neighborhood I've researched that's close to work and several reputable child-care providers" or is it, "The commute isn't that bad"? World-class denial will withstand this scrutiny, of course. But you get the idea. This test-my-logic method is also strictly about weighing criticism as objectively as you can; I'm not suggesting you use it to knock down your last iota of doubt. You need to heed your own reservations — and challenge your own reasoning — far more assiduously than you do anyone else's.

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Dear Carolyn:

Hate to add to the pile-up on single motherhood, really, but as the parent of a special-needs kid I feel a need to point out that kids don't always come made-to-order. I am in a good relationship with a healthy partner co-parenting my child, but I have had to give up literally everything else in my life to provide for my son's daily care. It would be impossible to do this as a single person. Please don't think that being artificially inseminated protects you from this possibility. There aren't tests for everything.

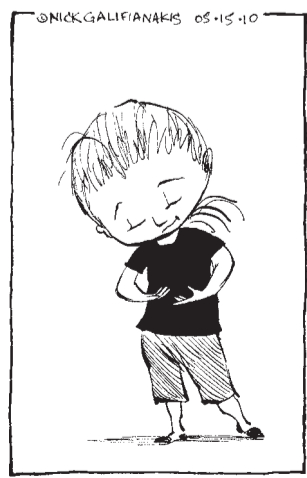
Yes, there are places to warehouse special-needs kids for people who don't have other options. But they are nowhere you'd really want your kid to spend his/her childhood. If you have piles of money, you can make single parenting work. If you don't have that and/or the village, or are so uncertain that you're writing to an advice columnist, well, continue to think on it . . .

Pittsburgh

You aren't piling on, you're posing a question every prospective parent should answer: Am I ready to get what I want, or am I ready to get what I get? The former is dreaming, the latter is parenthood. Thanks for weighing in.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays on www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or telme@washpost.com.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 865

In which we sought yet more Googlenopes — phrases that still yielded that "no results found" icon when you offer them to the Universe's Biggest Search Engine. Once again, some of the thousands of "Nopes" submitted were just convenient misspellings of names. For all the results below — which were still unique at press time — the phrases were entered within quotation marks. Capitalization didn't matter in the searches.



Both "Nobody understands me like my husband" and "Nobody understands me like my wife" (Mark Richardson, Washington)

Several entrants noted to the Empress that they were more amazed by the phrases that *did* produce a few hits, such as "National Beet Day" (discovered by Tom Kreitzberg) or "the wisdom of Tom Cruise" (noted by Russell Beland). These have been called Googleyups, and yes, we'll have to get to them. (We have already done Googlehacks, in which there is exactly one hit.)

- 2 the winner of the nine-inch-long black gummi rat: "I was persuaded by the picket sign" (Dan Steinberg, Silver Spring)
- 3 "President Obama wigs" (Mike Turniansky, Pikesville, Md.)
- 4 "I lost lots of weight by eating better and exercising" (Sheri Tardio, Prince Frederick)

NONE: THE LESS — HONORABLE MENTIONS

- "Lady Gaga wore a modest" . . . (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)
- "Muhammad Halloween masks" (Kevin Dopart, Washington)
- "I always lift the toilet seat for my husband" (David Thorne, Washington, a First Offender)
- "Now I understand all of 'Lost'" (Craig Dykstra, Centerville)
- "He's so spacey his brain farts cause global warming" (Roy Ashley, Washington)
- "We've decided to name our baby Eyjafjallajökull" (Dan Gordon, Arlington)
- "The Vatican reversed its policy on" . . . (Dan Ramish, Washington)
- "How to style your hair like Rod Blagojevich" (Steve Offutt, Arlington)
- "Hiking the Appalachian Trail with your wife" (Steve Offutt)
- "Find me an Amway dealer" (Russell Beland, Fairfax)
- "The GOP leadership sought a compromise" (Anne Paris, Arlington)
- "The Yiddish word for 'splurge'" (Rick Haynes, Potomac)
- "I wish Bush were still in the

- White House" (Dan Ramish)
- "They filled the pothole right away" (Ben Aronin, Arlington)
- "Our priest is celibate" (Kevin Dopart)
- "My ex-husband is an angel" (Kathy Bacskay, Lorton, a First Offender)
- "Brief remarks by the House speaker" (Jeff Contompasis)
- "I was outraged by that 'Family Circus' cartoon" (Julie Thomas and Will Cramer, Herndon)
- "If wishes were horses, birthday parties would reek." (Rachel A. Bernhardt, Silver Spring)
- "employed in Novi, Mich." (Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich.)
- "Kitty Kelley's balanced portrayal of" . . . (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)
- "The Manischewitz's refined bouquet" (Mike Gips, Bethesda)
- "French spam recipes" (Craig Dykstra)
- "beloved Redskins kicker" (Ward Kay, Vienna)
- "tattoos your mom will love" (Judy Blanchard)
- "Scranton getaway vacations" (Kevin Dopart)

- "I don't know, so I'll say nothing." (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)
- "unwanted strip of bacon" (Russell Beland)
- "My cat really cares about me" (Dan Klein, McLean)
- "the world's second-largest microbrewery" (Russell Beland)
- "Facebook: A better mousetrap" (Ben Aronin)
- "the best of the feel-good Russian novels" (Michael Woods, Arlington)
- "Three animals were harmed in the making of this movie" (Russell Beland)
- "The Amish Justin Timberlake" (Craig Dykstra)
- "I laughed at The Style Invitational" (Kevin Dopart)

Next week: Natalie Portmanteau, or Overlappellations

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at www.washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

STAX: The patron saint of lumberjacks.

Week 869: Clue us in

It's time for our backward crossword, this time courtesy of master constructor Paula Gamache. The words are already in the grid: Send us funny, clever clues for any of them. The clues don't have to be as brief as real clues, but they can't be really long. Please say which word the clue is for; don't just write "36 Down." For the results of our last crossword contest, see www.TinyURL.com/WPCrossword.



CROSSWORD BY PAULA GAMACHE

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. For second place — in the theme of our previous "Nunchuck" catapult gun — Russell Beland has donated the Baby Shower, which shoots out inch-long infants of various colors. The package does remind the consumer that "real babies should never be catapulted or thrown," along with the standard disclaimer that this product is not suitable for children under 3 years. So if you have a child 3 or older who'd like to shoot a baby . . . Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Loser Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, May 24. Put "Week 869" 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 to be published June 12. 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 results was sent by both Chris Doyle and Tom Witte; Tom also wrote this week's honorable-mentions subhead.

THEATER REVIEW

'Tactile Dinner': Lots to chew on

Interactive production gives Fringe Festival hit a savory second life

BY CELIA WREN

Does the war on American obesity have a new ally? A mustachioed guy in an aviator cap, goggles and black leather jacket is marching around a tiny cafe, yelling orders and poetic slogans at diners wearing white lab coats. "As futurists, you will agree that it is absolutely necessary to abolish pasta!" he roars. No, this is not low-carb-diet sage Dr. Atkins risen from the grave and dressed for a steampunk ball. It's Italian poet F.T. Marinetti (1876-1944) lorded it over "A Tactile Dinner," a stimulating and deliberately unnerving performance-art piece that's a revival of a 2009 Capital Fringe hit. Simmering at the Big Bear Cafe through Saturday and at the Long View Gallery on Sunday and Monday, this daringly interactive, philosophically pungent, meal-like extravaganza is designed to spatula audiences out of their comfort zones — theatrical and gustatory — and instill a new appreciation of sensory experience.

In addition to Marinetti (Ken Hays, with a military bearing), the production features several "servertrons" (Stephanie Davio, Carrie Monger, Melissa Krodman and Otis Ramsey-Zoe) who act as wordless waiters when not functioning as eerie vaudevillians or surreal drill sergeants. After donning the lab coats, which are curiously — and purposefully, it turns out — ornamented (red feather trim, button-like googly eyes, etc.), ticketholders take seats at small tables. The noise of zooming race cars whips through the space; and then . . .

It would be a shame to give too much away. Suffice it to say that this still-rattled reviewer — who will never think about ricotta in the same way again — has vivid memories of sandpaper-and-flattened-kumquat pairings, a vibrating floor, a blindfold, a cottony twig whose flavor evoked scorched celery marinated in witch hazel, and music that sounded like a construction site mated with a glockenspiel. (The performances at Long View Gal-



EMILE BENJAMIN

OPEN WIDE! Carrie Monger, left, and Amrita Campbell in the *Banished? Productions* extravaganza.

lery will include more courses and run 15 minutes longer than the 60-minute Big Bear Cafe edition.)

This orgy of synapse-battering is not pure whimsy on the part of conceiver/director Carmen C. Wong and *Banished? Productions*, the self-described "avant-pop" producing company. "Tactile Dinner's" concept and script draw heavily on the 1932 "Futurist Cookbook" and other writings of Marinetti, whose brainchild, futurism, launched in 1909, was an iconoclastic artistic and literary movement in love with technology, modernism and speed. The movement's ideology strayed toward militarism and fascism, as "Tactile Dinner" smartly acknowledges at several points.

A serving of aesthetic anarchy that's not for the faint of heart or of stomach, this show seems particularly well suited to a country suffering from bad eating habits and awaiting the advent of a second food-centric cable channel. After Marinetti points out the essential arbitrariness of taste, you'll be less likely to mindlessly down that bag of Doritos. But you may second-guess that organic, locally grown shallot-and-spinach terrine, too.

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Watch it, adults. Girls shouldn't be 'Ladies'

GIRLS FROM CI

belittling lesson. And that's what's so bewildering about this video: We know it's wrong. *Didn't their parents know it was wrong?*

It isn't prudish to think 7-year-olds ought to look like 7-year-olds. It's prudent. Twisted minds are surely drooling over the exhibitionism of the Beyoncé bunch. Pedophiles don't need more kindling on their deranged fires, but displays like this one shovel it on. And put other little girls at risk.

What's troubling here is more than just the moves these kids are making — it's the element of adult manipulation behind them. Sexy children, pushy parents: Think back on JonBenet Ramsey, the rouged and blow-dried beauty pageant princess, dead at 6. The irony is that kiddie pageants back then — she was killed in 1996 — were undoubtedly tamer than some of them are nowadays, with skimpy attire and dirty dancing all the rage. (Look at the one depicted in the 2006 film "Little Miss Sunshine," in which Abigail Breslin's young character performs a striptease.) Same thing on certain dance competition circuits — like the one that launched this video.

I watch this bunch of energetic 7-year-olds and wish that, with those kicks and their apparent athleticism, they were outside on a soccer field, enjoying a sport that focuses on play — and not so much on the body.

I have a 7-year-old daughter, and her passion at the moment

is turning perfect cartwheels, playing baseball and inventing dramatic scenarios for her collection of tiny plastic animals. Peer pressure doesn't seem to be an issue yet, but then again, most of her friends are into the same things — gymnastics, storytelling, inventive play. Happily, my daughter seems to have a view of herself that has nothing to do with starlet underdressing, sexuality beyond her years or the latest trend in music videos.

Will this always be the case? I can only say I hope so — and I know for sure that one way to grow a head case with low self-esteem and a body-image problem is to plunk her in front of music videos that hype sex appeal and tell girls their greatest asset is that thing they're sitting on.

Of course, the Beyoncé Five have gone a whole lot of steps beyond just watching the grown-up moves. I'm impressed by their flexibility and clean execution. But at the same time I wonder, what kind of dance teachers (paid by the parents) drilled them for hours and hours in the chilly perfection of a routine that feels so exploitative of their energy, innocence and charm? Soon enough, these girls, like girls everywhere, will have to navigate tricky adolescent waters, learning to dodge what's unsafe and unwise, and finding out what true power, self-respect and individuality look like.

This performance gives them a big shove in the wrong direction.

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DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU

