

Times of friendliness are few

Dear Annie: My sister's son, "Jared," lives close to us but far from his mother. We always invite them to family get-togethers, but are never sure whether they will show up. Sometimes they don't respond, sometimes they show up without responding, and sometimes they call at the last minute to say they are sick and can't come.

Jared was raised by my sister and her second husband. When my sister comes to visit Jared, his wife, "Claire," stays in her room. She doesn't come out to say hello or goodbye. The excuse is that she's "not well." My sister only comes three times a year for a couple of days because she wants to see their grandchildren. Claire does nothing for the kids. Her parents, who live with them, take care of the children.

Jared's biological father has been out of his life since he was a child. But a few years ago, a biological aunt looked up my nephew and contacted Claire. Ever since, Claire has been friendly to the bio-dad's family, inviting them over and spending holidays with them. But she totally ignores our side of the family.

There are periodic episodes of almost bizarre friendliness from Claire, and we always eagerly respond to these moments, but they are few and far between and never result in closer ties.

We've been told that Claire has a wonderful, outgoing personality at work. But with us, she barely communicates. She and Jared don't socialize with friends, ei-

Annie's Mailbox

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ther. I think Claire may suffer from depression or bipolar disease. I realize it is Jared's place to speak up, but he's very nonconfrontational and becomes defensive.

What is the best way to handle Jared and Claire? My sister just accepts the situation because she can't do anything about it. — *Illinois Aunt*

Dear Aunt: Your sister is right. When you cannot change an unpleasant situation, you need to step back, lower your expectations and let it go. Claire is rude and disrespectful, and she is nicer to the bio-family because they are less connected to Jared and therefore less threatening to her. You certainly have reason to stop inviting them over, but if you would rather continue seeing Jared and his children, you will have to tolerate Claire.

Dear Annie: My wife and I are 75, with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We are still paying off our credit card bills from Christmas. It's difficult for us to shop. We don't

know what they want and can't afford much. My wife does a great job purchasing clothing and toys, but they don't seem terribly happy to open the presents. We still have a gift in our house for one great-granddaughter because her parents don't care enough to pick it up. Of course, none of the adult grandchildren has ever purchased us a gift.

What is a solution for people our age whose gift-buying increases every year and the recipients don't seem to appreciate it? I told my wife that maybe we should give a donation in their name. — *Grandpa*

Dear Grandpa: A donation is lovely, provided they don't object to the charity you have selected. Or give each child a tin of Grandma's special cookies or Grandpa's favorite tea. Great-grandchildren can be "given" an evening with you, popcorn and a rented movie. Please don't go broke trying to please kids who don't know how to be grateful.

Dear Annie: This is for "Uncle Joe," the 88-year-old mentally ill uncle whose sister insists that he be invited to holiday gatherings. The key message is: "He ruins it for everybody." If he refuses help, leave him out and tell him why.

I was 70 years old before I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression. I was put on the right medication and never looked back. It is not too late for Joe, but if he is too stubborn for treatment, leave him home. — *Been There*

Tomorrow's horoscope

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). In business, if a vendor charges significantly lower than competitors, the item or service will be considered "cheap." Whatever you offer today, check out the going rate and price accordingly.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). You may feel that your talents and passions are not being properly utilized in your current position, and yet today's activities only highlight a narrow aspect of the entire job. Be patient.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Some people so strongly identify with being a victim that they will unconsciously sabotage whatever good comes into their experience. This is why you shouldn't take it personally if your help doesn't really seem to help.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You hate goodbyes, and yet they have to happen to move on to the next chapter. Cheerful and short will be best, with the additional clause of "Until next time..."

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Even though you take the needs and wants of those around you into consideration, the one who will be most affected by your next move is you. Act accordingly.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Good news: there is no salvation in the future. Salvation is in the present. Forgive and save. This is the order of the moment. Liberate yourself; do it now.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Love cannot flourish without space. Some need it more than others. Your sensitivity to the spatial requirements of others (emotional and physical) will make you a most desirable friend and partner.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Addictive temptations are more dangerous than they seem. The best tactic is to stay away completely. Why make it harder on yourself? Avoid potential trouble by walking the other way.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Embracing only the parts of you that you think are acceptable and/or desirable will diminish your power. Awesome power comes from embracing the good, the bad and the ugly.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). What if you came at life like you had nothing to prove? What would you do differently? To be content in oneself "as is" is of life's greatest satisfactions. Stop the striving for a day, or better yet for a month.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You can devote yourself to others with no loss to yourself. You may experience a loss of ego, and that may hurt, but loss of ego is not the same as loss of self.

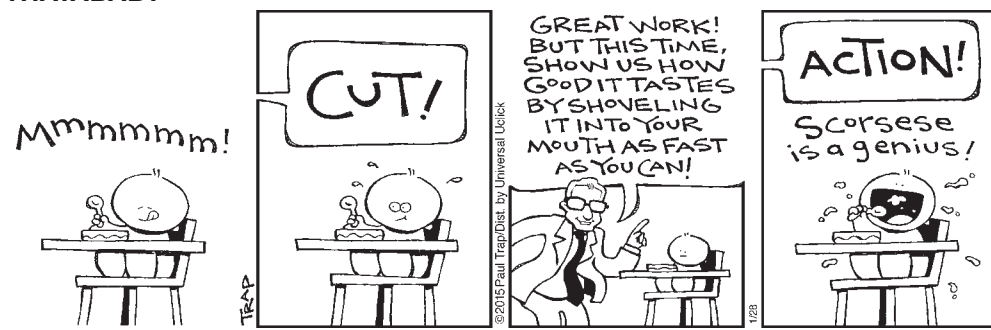
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Feeling unequipped? It's not true! You have enough and you are enough. Anyway, purchases made out of insecurity will always be followed by buyer's regret.

THURSDAY'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 29). Even though it's your birthday, you want to solve, heal or fix something before you're really in the celebrating mood. You'll do it over the next three weeks, and then you'll be ready for an adventure involving a dear friend and a big project. March and June are the most romantic months. April is home-makeover time. Aquarius and Aries adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 41, 3, 33, 35 and 9.

FRANK AND ERNEST



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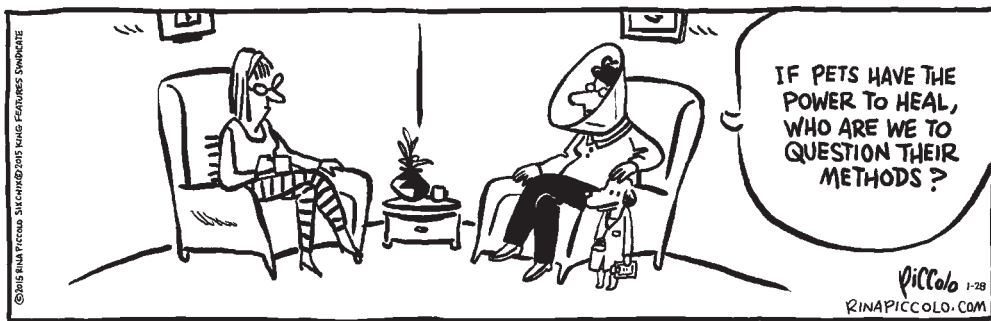
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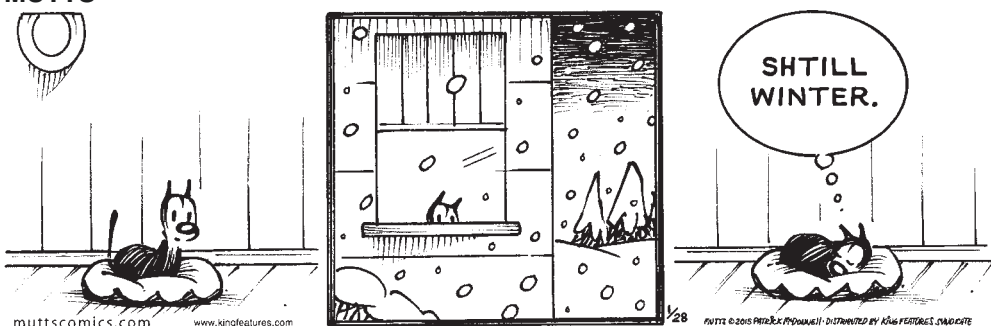
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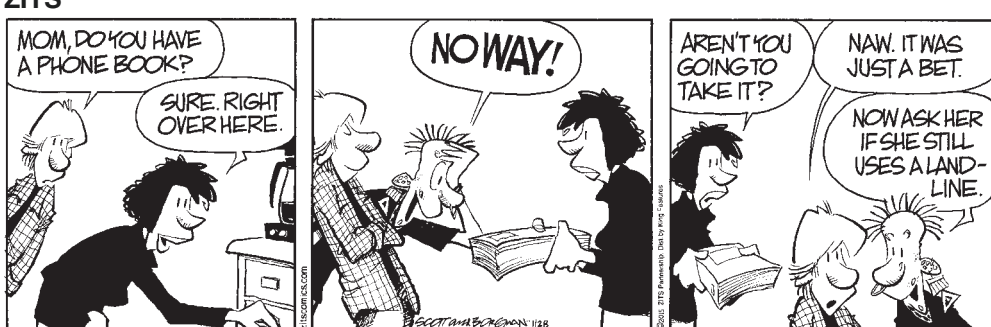
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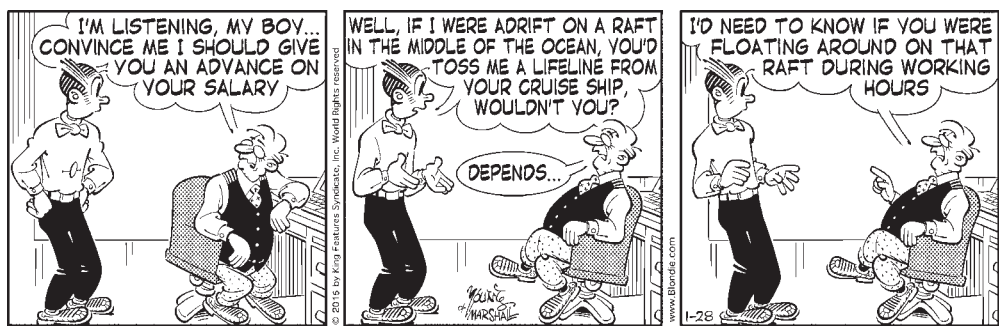
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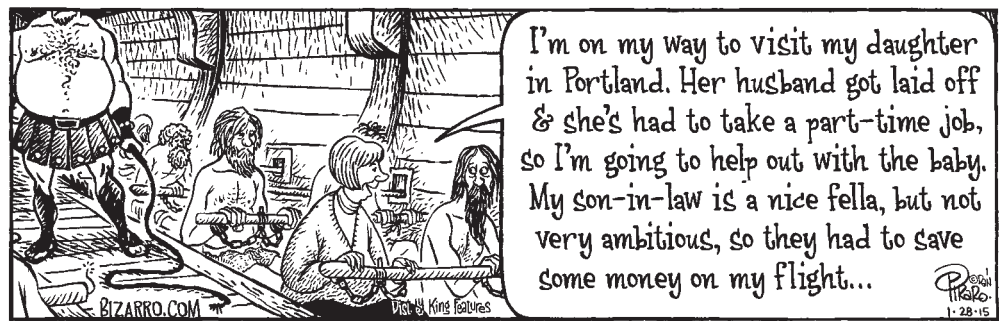
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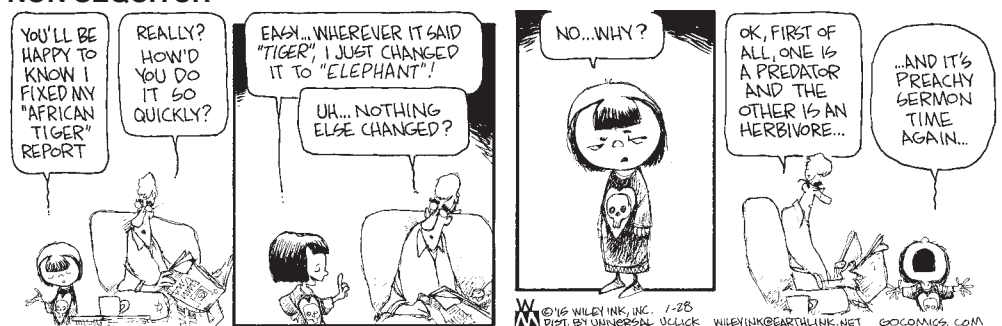
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