

Eating disorders affect many

Dear Annie: People think they know how eating disorders start, but I want to share my story, which might surprise people. I never set out to have an eating disorder. In fact, I didn't even set out to lose weight. However, after I took up running to relieve stress and ended up losing a few pounds, I was pleasantly surprised by how people reacted to me and how I felt about myself.

Pretty soon, running became more of an obligation than something I did to relieve stress. Then, I became obsessed with everything I ate. I had to eat certain things at certain times of the day and it all had to be super healthy. My world was getting smaller and smaller, as I eliminated various foods and drinks. Being with friends who questioned my habits became too much effort, so I withdrew socially. Without friends around to keep me in check, the weight dropped off drastically and I became emaciated. I thought I was fine.

Finally, my parents stepped in and threatened me with involuntary hospitalization, so I submitted to treatment. It wasn't easy, and I mourned the loss of my hypercontrolled life. But it was worth it. Not only did it save my life, but also it

Annie's Mailbox

Creators
Syndicate Inc.

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enabled me to have a life filled with normal, fun activities that would not have been possible when I was sick. I remember the first time I went out for Mexican food with friends after my recovery. I ate enchiladas and drank a margarita and realized that I was rediscovering a life that I thought I had lost forever.

I want people to know that treatment is effective. There is a great life out there waiting for them. — Rachel

Dear Rachel: Thank you. Eating disorders and body dissatisfaction affect men and women of all races and all walks of life. They have the highest rate of mortality of any mental illness. Unfortunately, of the 30 million men and women who suffer from a clinically significant eating disorder during their lifetime, only a small percentage seeks treatment. There are free and

anonymous screenings available at MyBodyScreening.org, where you will be provided with local resources and can take the first step toward healing. We hope our readers and their loved ones will check it out.

Dear Annie: Like "Bah, Humbug," my family also includes people who are better off than others. At Christmas, we give to charity. We try to find a worthy cause that the relative would appreciate. My father likes to build things, so I might choose a bag of nails for Habitat for Humanity. For my brother, I once chose a portion of a donkey from the Heifer Project. He had great fun with that when people would ask him what he got.

You could do this any time during the year and then send a card at Christmas telling the person of your gift in their honor. It leaves everyone with a good feeling, and they know they have helped others. — No Stress

Dear No Stress: This type of gift is a wonderful idea and can be tailored to anyone's specific interests. As always, please check out the charity with one of the watchdog organizations such as charitynavigator.org, charitywatch.org or give.org.

Tomorrow's horoscope

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): You may engage in bargaining without even realizing it, as there are deals to be struck that don't require any exchanging of words. Decisions will count; actions will speak.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Be careful not to get caught in the middle of warring parties. There won't be a winning side, for starters. And when the two reconcile they will surely turn on anyone who was involved in the conflict.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21): The laundry list of qualities to make up the perfect partner may go out the window as it becomes clearer to you what really matters now: namely, chemistry and compatible lifestyles. Have faith in your intuition.

CANCER (June 22-July 22): Privacy is always your prerogative. Those who ask probably don't deserve to know, and you have no obligation to tell, either. Besides, loved ones respect you more when you reveal less.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): It's not hard to be part of the good stuff now. You're aware; you look around, see what needs doing and act immediately. The simplicity of your choice will keep you in an exciting flow of life.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): There are certain issues you feel strongly enough to stand firm on, and therefore you've a few unbendable rules — the chief one of the day being to remain flexible in all matters at all times.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23): If you don't yet have what it takes, don't worry; you will. Your ability will swell when the challenge at hand invites it to. This is especially true on an intellectual level. You'll grow smarter in a

demanding learning environment.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): Sometimes the deadline, bustle and hurry bring out the best in you, but not now. So go ahead and take off the pressure. Stroll through life instead of running around.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Your teachers have been stellar, but that's not to say you couldn't use a few fresh influences. Reach out and you'll learn what you need to know to take your career to the next level.

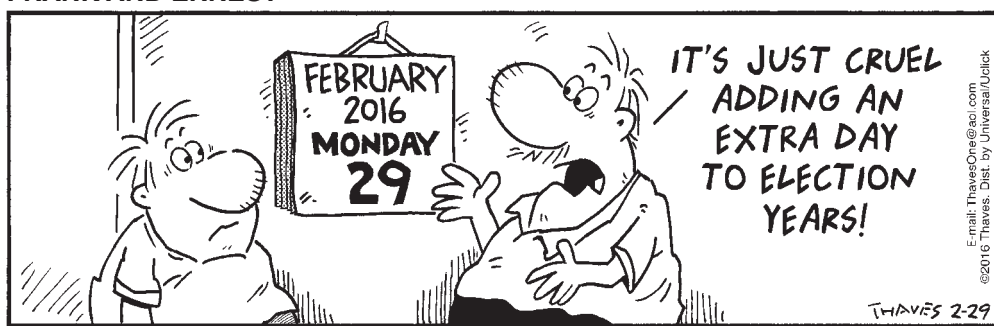
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): You're a natural-born cheerleader, inspiring and motivating all who come near, though most won't show it. In fact, you would never guess how energizing your support really is.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Your intensity level may be too much for today's situation, so hold back. The restraint you show will be admired. Then, when the drama boils over, you'll still have plenty of energy left in you to carry on productively.

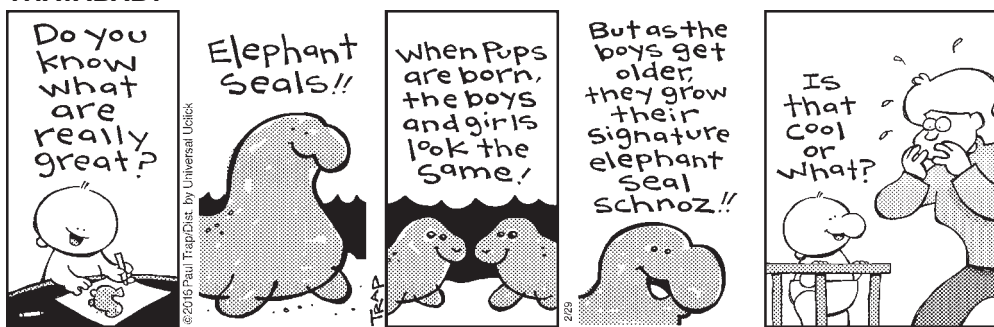
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Of course you want to succeed! The question now is, at what cost? Doing your best is one thing. Then there's the above-and-beyond efforts you could make. Would they be worth it?

TUESDAY'S BIRTHDAY (March 1): You know that you deserve goodness and you gladly accept the bounty that drops into your life over the next six weeks. April brings a different kind of love. May features a reversal, and it likely has financial implications. Lifestyle moves don't have to be expensive. Find a more economic way and you'll be glad five years from now. Cancer and Virgo adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 1, 28, 33, 2 and 50.

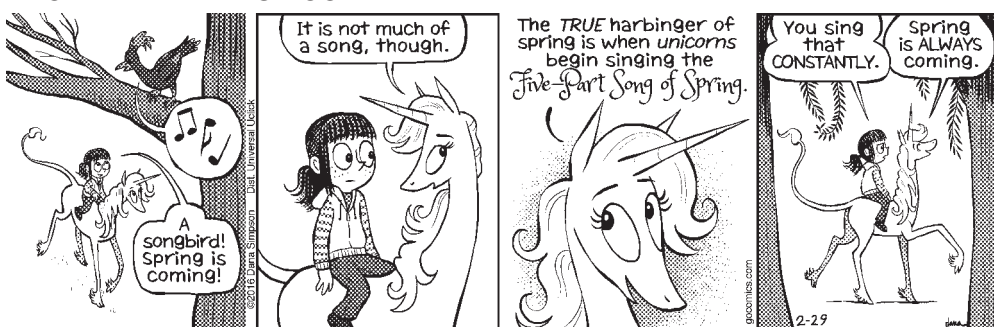
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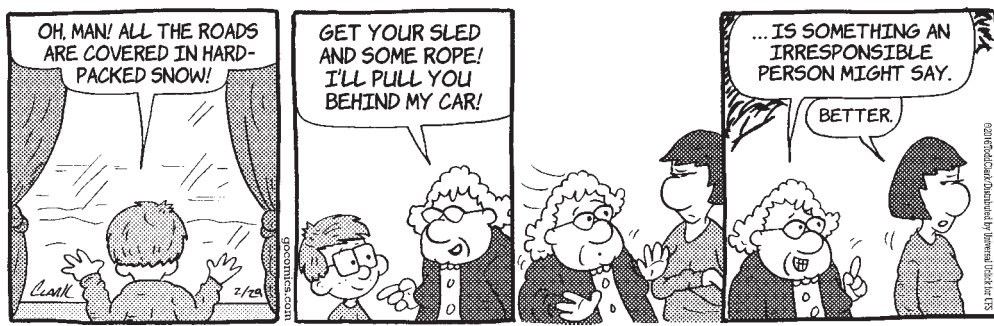
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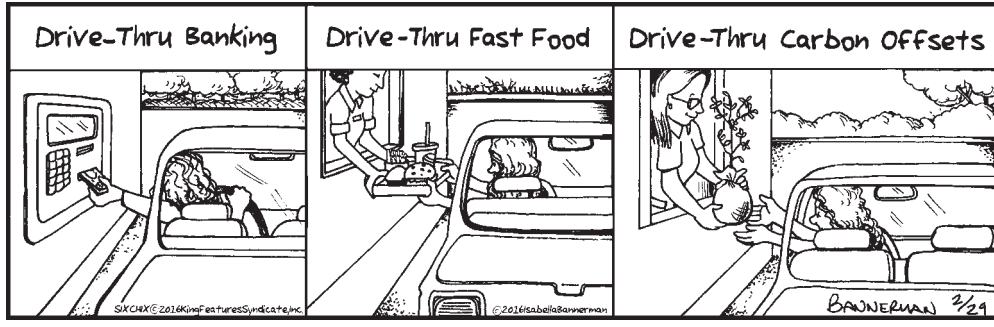
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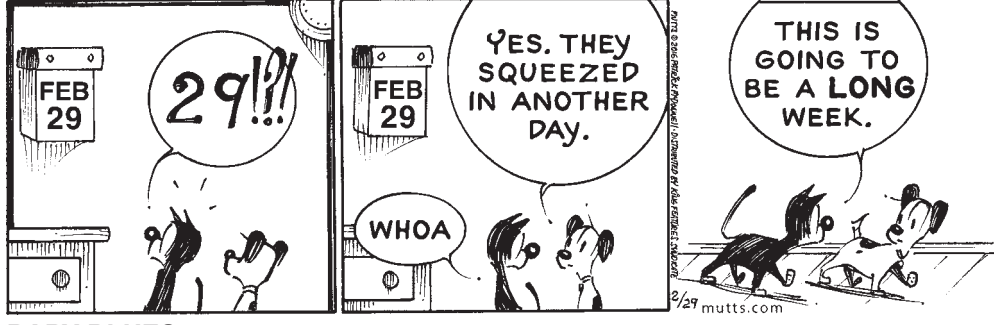
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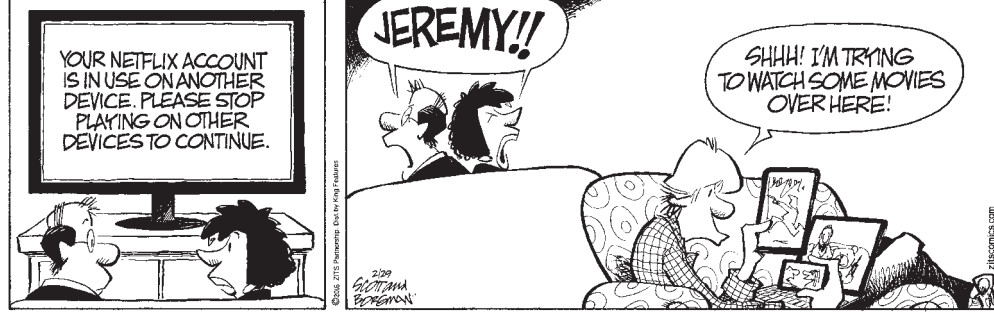
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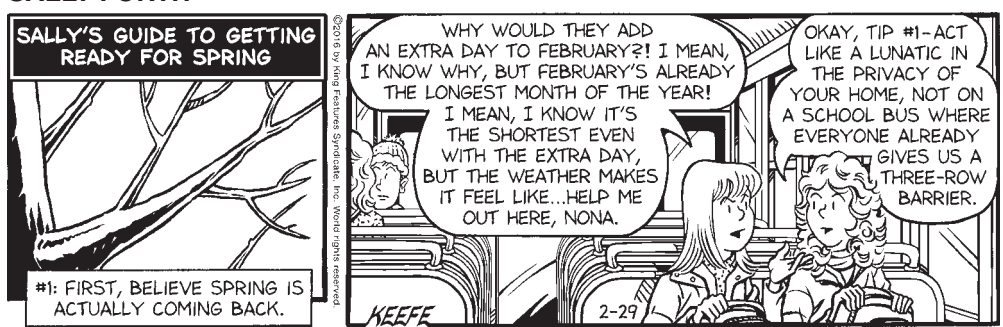
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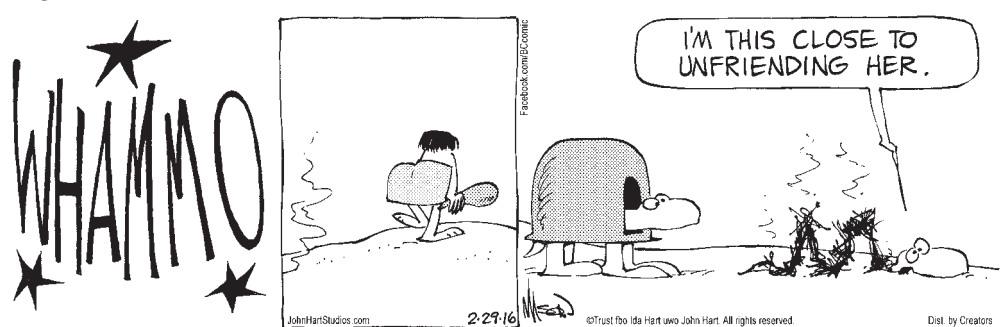
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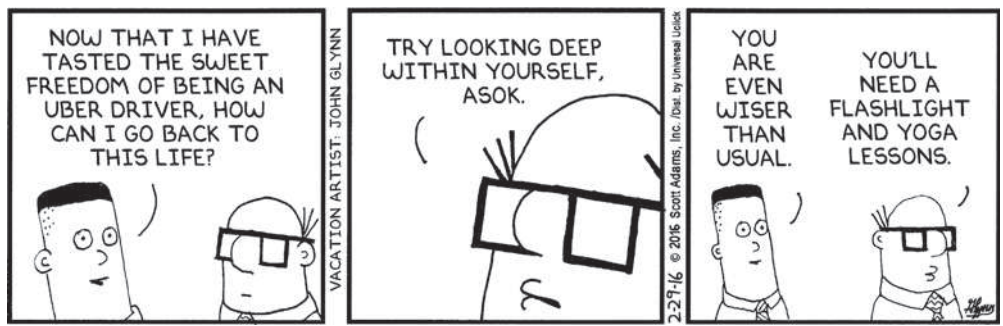
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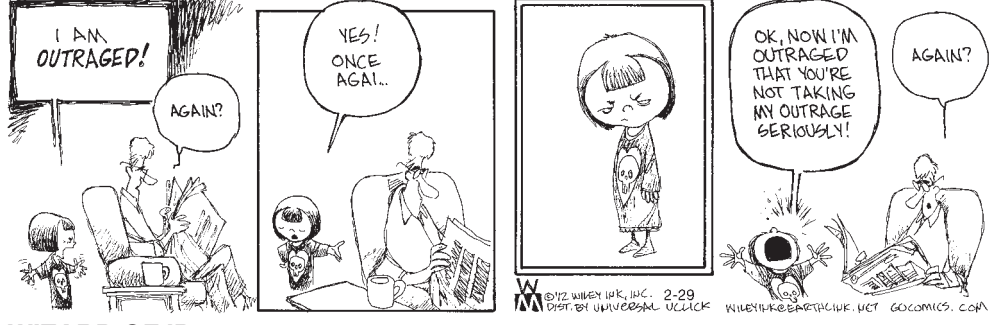
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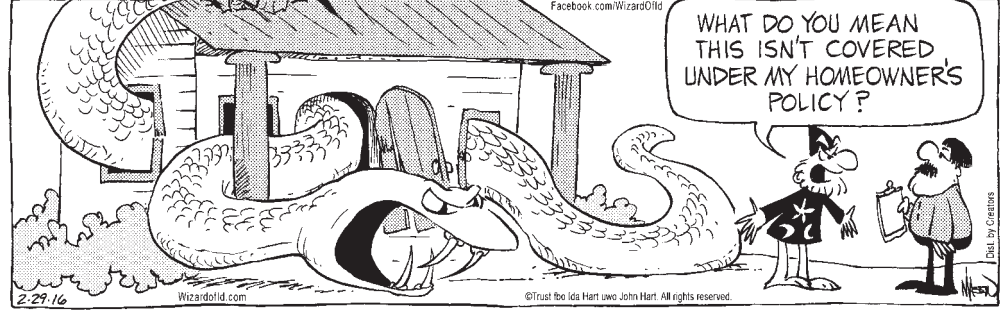
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