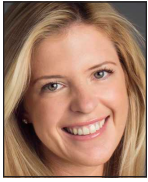


Is this an abusive streak?

Dear Annie: I have a friend I've known for at least 15 years. A month ago, I invited her and her husband for dinner. When both of my kids told me they didn't want her over, I couldn't believe it. I asked why. I told them that she's always been good to them and she'd love to see them, especially my son, who has been away at college.

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
Syndicate Inc.

My son told me she isn't really my friend, that she only pretends she is because she thinks I am an abusive parent and she feels sorry for my kids. Apparently, she has felt this way for years, ever since my daughter was having a birthday party and I wouldn't let her have cake because she wouldn't eat her dinner. He also relayed her thought that I am a horrible parent because I won't play games with my kids. I have a really bad fear of playing games with people, which is no different from being scared of snakes or being claustrophobic.

I asked my daughter whether this is the reason she doesn't want this woman over, and she said yes. She said the only reason she did not tell me about this sooner was

that she didn't want to hurt my feelings. I asked myself and my kids, "Am I really abusive?"

Both of my kids told me that I am a little stricter than the average parent and have a tendency to scream a lot, but not more than most parents when they're angry about what the kids did or did not do.

I'm still going to have dinner with this woman. After dinner, the children will probably take off and go to their rooms, as they truly don't want anything to do with her anymore. I thought I would confront her after dinner and give her a chance to explain why she has tried to turn my children against me. I really did think she was my friend for so many years.

Do you think this is the right course of action? — *Hurt and Confused in Kansas*

Dear Hurt: Yes, talk to your friend — but think of it as a conversation rather than a confrontation; otherwise, you're setting yourself up for a hostile interaction. Give her a chance to explain herself. There's a lot to be said for hearing it from the source. You

might want to go for a walk or out for coffee, to be in a neutral space and away from the kids.

And I would suggest looking inward. Is it possible you do raise your voice too loudly and too often? I know we all lose our cool from time to time, but there are better ways to get one's point across than yelling.

Dear Annie: In response to "Grieving for Snoopy," you printed "The Rainbow Bridge," a poem by Steve and Diane Bodofsky. I know that the poem was written with good intentions, but it never did a thing for me. The best advice to give a grieving pet owner, in my opinion, is to suggest that when she's ready, she should go find that special dog or cat waiting at a local animal shelter. It won't be "the same," but it will be an individual with a unique, lovable nature. I still miss my old dog from way back when, but I no longer grieve.

Five years ago, we reluctantly took care of a kitten. It was "just for a while" because we didn't want a cat. Now he's the heart of our family, the mellowest of fellows. As Mark Twain said, a house is not a home without a cat. Or a dog. — *Kay from New Paltz, N.Y.*

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Who has time to judge other people? Judges. Well, they're getting paid for it. Anyone who judges but isn't getting paid for it simply doesn't have enough excitement to draw the focus elsewhere.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). No opportunity can be written off today. Big and small, seize them all! Be on the lookout for opportunities that don't really seem like they are. Those are the ones to catch.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). The current problems are not interrupting your joy; in fact, they are a nice big slice of your joy. Somewhere in you, you know that you can overcome this, and overcome it you will.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You might know what the expectation would typically be in a given situation, but since there are individuals involved whose minds you can't read, you don't know what the expectation actually is. So, you may as well suit yourself.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). The one with the biggest picture wins every time. Today's win: The side benefits will outweigh the real ones. This will happen because you're playing a larger game than the one at the table you're sitting around.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Everyone on the earth's face wants to feel better, but each will go about it in different ways. Today, your tolerance for another person's methods will make both of your lives easier.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Just as there are spaces in your home that you don't use, there are spaces in your psyche that go untouched — that is, until certain people come along. You'll enjoy how the related emotional

dynamic plays out today.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Better to take one piece of good advice and apply it to your life than to listen to 60 adages and apply none.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Bottom line: If you are worried about rejection, then your fear is stronger than your desire. It's not a good place to come from in business, and it's a disastrous position if pleasure is your aim.

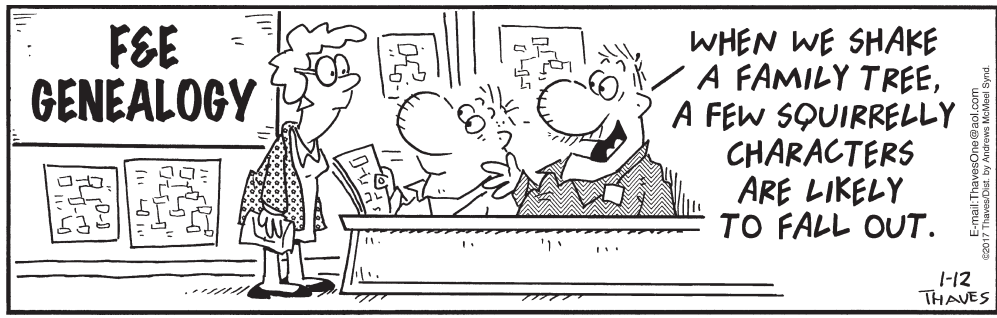
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Your mind can be crueler to you than any person has ever been. Do not let negative thinking keep you from taking an exciting risk. If you desire it, you can break your mental chains.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Remember when you went from one serious relationship straight into another and missed out on all that fun? What you learned from that will inform your weekend.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). People like the idea of winging things spontaneously, because that feels fun in the mind. But when it translates to real life, well, it could go a lot of ways. And it will. It can't hurt to also have a plan in your back pocket.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 13). It's not enough for you to have a good experience, because you're looking for epic. You'll get that, too, especially when you make an effort in March (and then again with a ripe opportunity of June). Hard workers inspire you to work even harder in the hot months. You'll sock away money to focus on an August opportunity. Taurus and Gemini adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 7, 30, 20, 12 and 1.

FRANK AND ERNEST



BLONDIE



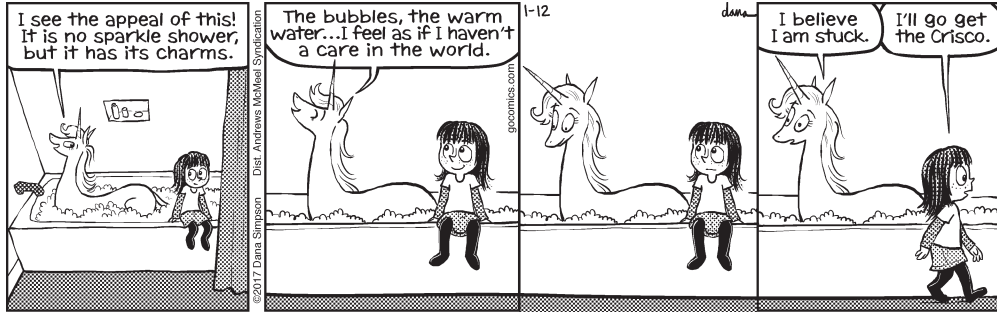
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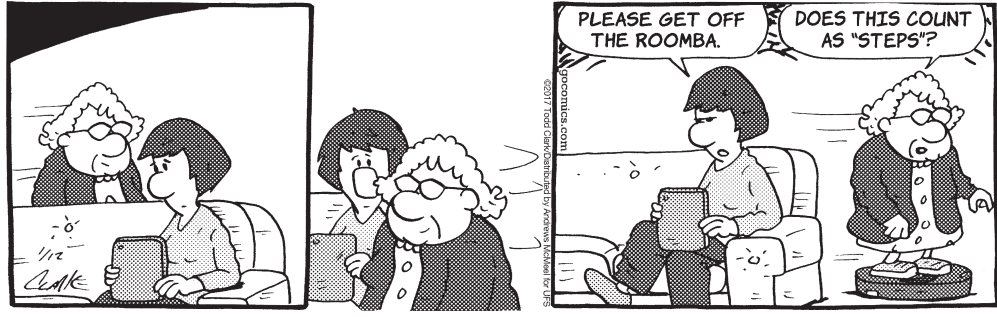
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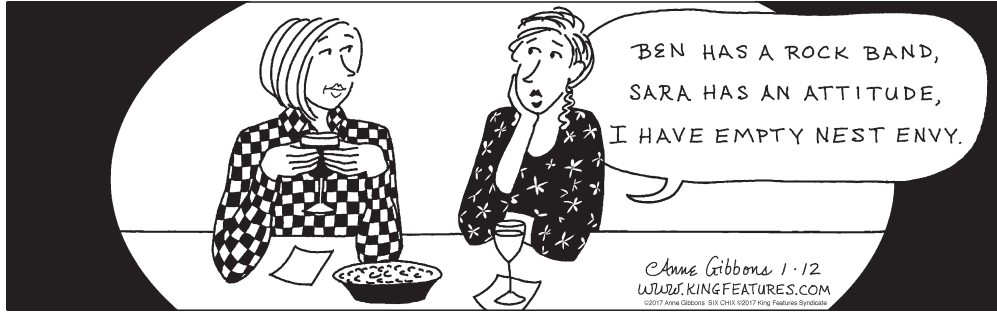
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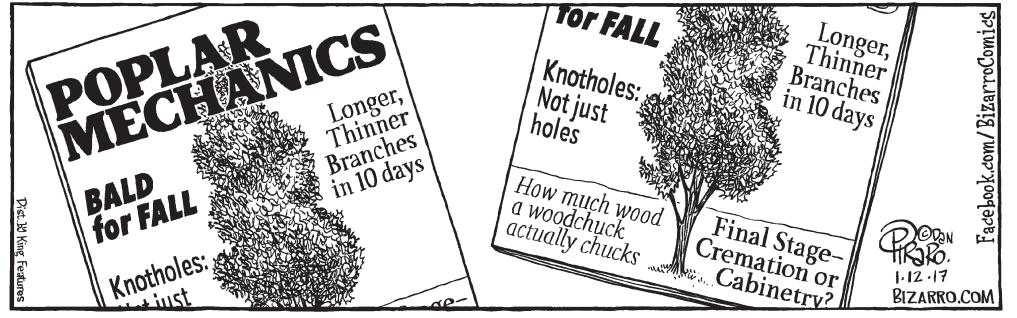
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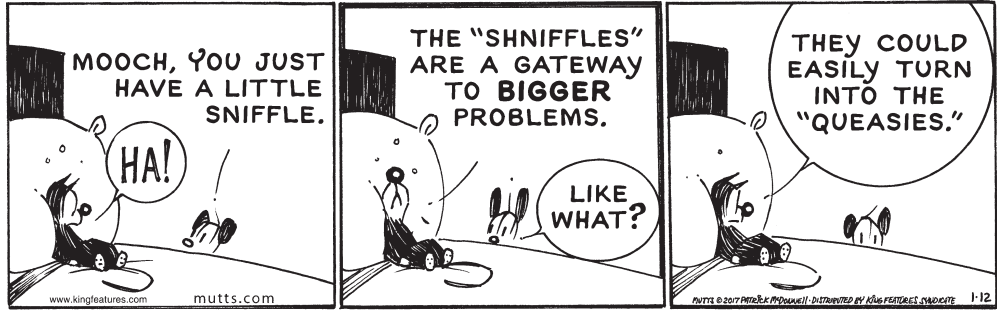
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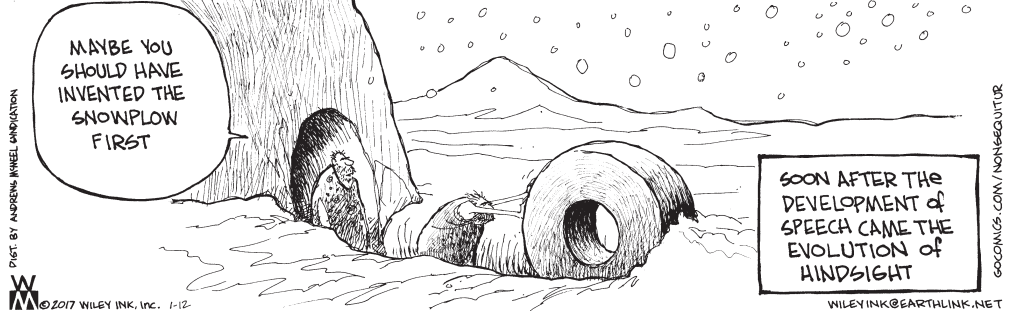
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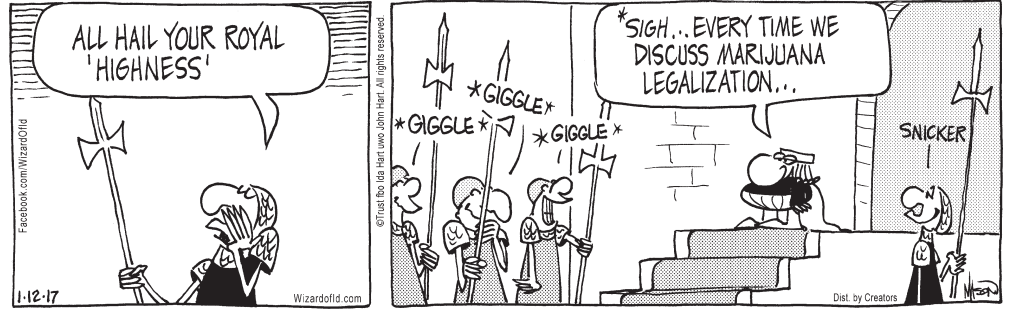
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