

Friend's behavior changes

Dear Annie: I have a friend named "Paula." At least I think she's my friend. We met in nursing school in the 1980s and have hung out ever since. But for almost a year, she's been acting odd.

We like to go out for Chinese food at least once a month. She often calls at the last minute saying she is sick or didn't get to sleep till 4 a.m. or some other excuse. It recently took her over a month to get over a stomach virus. But she was well enough during this time to go to a church retreat two hours away and meet with her sister. She said she stayed in the room a lot. Prior to this trip, she had been in the emergency room with an IV because she had gotten dehydrated.

She has a bad hip, and instead of using a walker, she uses two canes.

The most recent time we went out, we decided to shop a little. She is germaphobic and won't drink out of a water fountain. She tried to go into the employee lounge of the store to get a soft drink. Thank goodness the employees who stopped her were nice, and one got her a drink.

She acts so erratically at times that I wonder whether she's on

drugs. If I call her, it may take a week or more before she calls back. She's been divorced three times. She won't watch one particular TV show because it reminds her of her second husband. She won't watch another show because it takes place in the city where she lived with her third husband and it reminds her of that. She doesn't like a certain country singer because the singer's name is similar to the name of a woman a boyfriend of hers left her for.

I know she's on meds for depression, but they don't seem to help. What can I do? She won't let me in her house, and I know why. I can smell the cat and dog feces from the porch. She was never like this. Please help. — *A Concerned Friend*

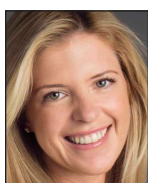
Dear Concerned: You've been friends with this woman for about 30 years, so the sudden flakiness is cause for concern about her well-being, especially in light of all the other erratic behaviors you mentioned. She may be suffering from dementia (of which hoarding is a symptom), depression or another condition, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, which also causes hoard-

ing. (Visit <https://iocdf.org> for more information.)

You can't handle this situation on your own. Enlist the help of her family and/or of professionals. Encourage her to seek and accept help. She is not mentally well right now, and she may not take kindly to your involvement, at least not at first. But it's the right thing to do, and she's lucky to have a friend like you.

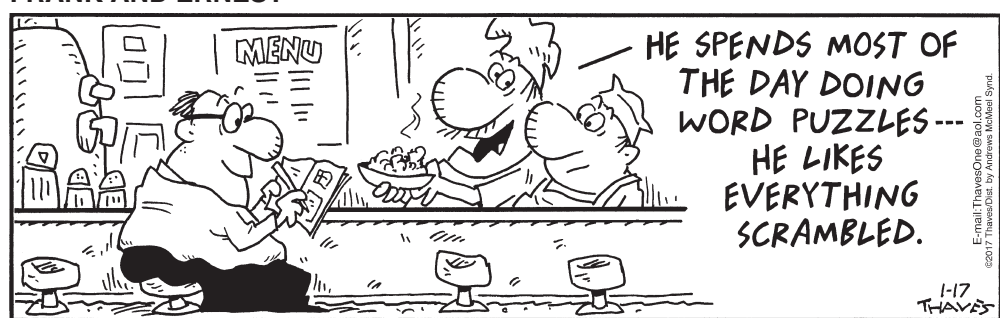
Dear Annie: This is in response to "Nancy Across the Way," who is fed up with how the young mother across the street yells at her kids. I am not advocating yelling, but as a mom of two young boys, I can identify with how difficult it is to be on time in the morning. Additionally, there is much involved behind closed doors, and the mom may live with mental illness in some aspect. I am married to someone who has a mood disorder, and most days are very difficult for our family. Most folks who live with this are isolated and have few friends. My advice to the neighbor is to help this mother reduce her isolation. Offer support instead of judgment. Perhaps Nancy could take her focus off the yelling by baking some cookies and giving this mom a word of support. It would speak volumes and probably make Nancy feel better, too. — *In Peace and Hope*

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
Syndicate Inc.

FRANK AND ERNEST



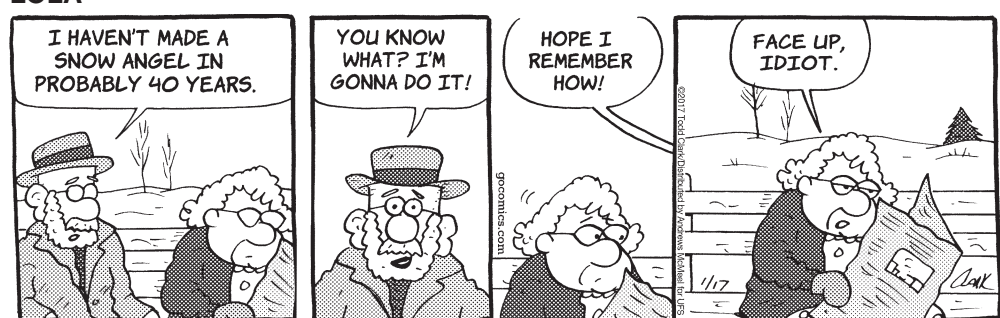
THATABABY



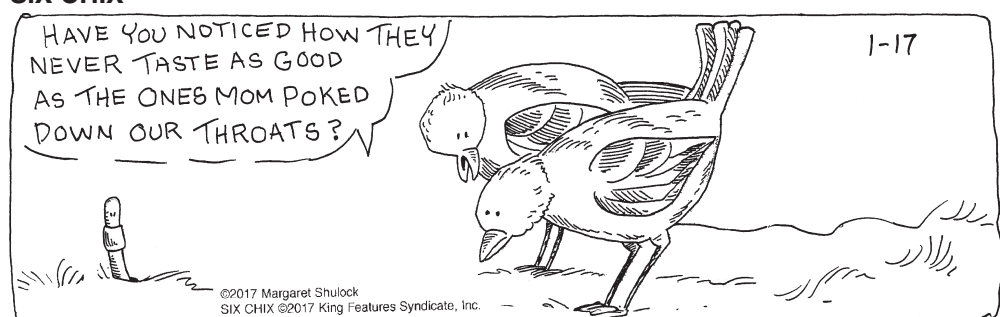
PHOEBE AND HER UNICORN



LOLA



SIX CHIX



MUTTS



BABY BLUES



ZITS



TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). The current speed of time is one second per second. Try to stay inside of that, as one might stay inside a car on the freeway; speeding through and yet simultaneously rather still. **TAURUS (April 20-May 20).** Amp up the importance of your goal. If it's important enough, you'll relate all decisions to the ultimate vision of that goal. With everything you do, you'll ask: Does it get me closer?

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). You'll spend part of the day figuring out what is best for the health and development of another person. It's not so easy to forget all about you and really feel life as the other person might. This is love.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You take a personal approach, perform with fluidity and leave your audience (whether it be one or 100) thinking: "Who was that, and how can I get more?"

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Cognitive dissonance isn't something people experience in times of crisis. To some degree it's the constant. Our brains are wired to continuously deal with internal disagreement. Humor helps. Parts of today will be absolutely hilarious.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You can't help whom you prefer, though of course it's only natural to want to spend more time with the one who inspires a warm and reflective feeling in you and less time with the one who makes you work in some way or another.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). When you know you don't have much time for a task, you tend to give it your deep, full attention. This is why it will help you to set a strict time limit on things that don't naturally have one.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). There's a reason why videos of funny dogs and cute kittens are the online refuge of children from ages 1-101. We could all use a little levity and softness in our experience. None will be immune to this need today.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Change always comes at a cost. Lose this, gain that — this is the balance of life. The best is when you wind up trading something you can no longer use for something you can (like what happens today!)

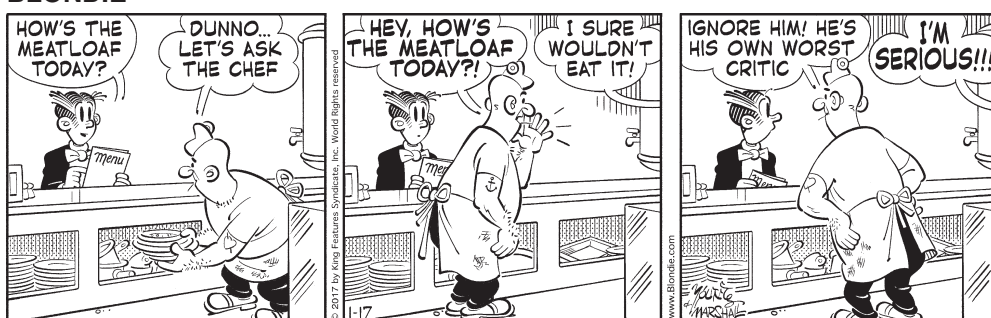
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). The old way is safe, comfortable and familiar. It's also boring you to tears. You'll come up with a new way. Give yourself the best chance at being accepted by privately working out the bugs before presenting.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). The best perk about seeing new places in the world is that it enables you to finally see your homeland for what it is. Contrast is necessary for perception. It takes two eyes to see depth.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Making things too easy for the other person is actually not very nice. This why "no spoilers" is a good policy, and it's also why you should never give an unwrapped gift. The prize is in the discovery.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 18). You take an active role in your environment. Your every interaction is a kind of creation. People insist you join them, stating, "It won't be the same without you," and they're right. You'll work in different groups and take home two victory "trophies" by April. Heartfelt promises will be exchanged in May. Leo and Pisces adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 7, 1, 42, 9 and 38.

BLONDIE



SALLY FORTH



B.C.



DILBERT



BIZARRO



NON SEQUITUR



WIZARD OF ID



ROSE IS ROSE

