

Surprise at a high price

Dear Annie: My husband and I were recently invited to a surprise birthday party for his 30-year-old daughter, "Marcy." We received the "invitation" by text three days before the party via the son-in-law's mother, and it was scheduled at an expensive restaurant. Seemed a little off, as it was less than two weeks before Christmas and many budgets are stretched now, but the son-in-law and his family are well-to-do. We and other family members RSVP'd that yes, we were coming.

The day of the party, we all received another text with specific instructions about what time Marcy's husband would be bringing her and not to answer any calls from her; it was all a big happy surprise for her. The text also mentioned that the cost of a meal at this restaurant would be between \$75 and \$120 per couple. Am I a fuddy-duddy to think this was inappropriate?

We let the text inviter know that most of us would not be staying for dinner so she could change the reservation. One person was angry and opted out completely. We went for the "surprise" part, gave Marcy

our gifts and politely visited. When all the son-in-law's family abruptly took seats at one end of the table, we left. The son-in-law's comment when we left was, "Are you sure you don't want to stay?"

My husband and I would have been glad to assist financially with this party or suggest a less expensive alternative so all our family could have attended without feeling burdened — if we would have been asked. My husband loves his daughter, but it seems the son-in-law and his family buy her away from us whenever possible. And she loves it, but it really makes for some hard feelings, especially during the holidays. — *Family Stressed*

Dear Stressed: Sending out a last-minute "Oh, by the way, hope you're all prepared to spend \$100 tonight" text? That's the wrong kind of surprise party.

I'm guessing that money has never been much of an issue for these people, so they're probably clueless. Clue them in. Ask them to get you involved earlier in the process next time so you can help plan and contribute.

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
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But once you have communicated to them your wishes and been open about your expectations for them, you must let go of the hard feelings. As the saying goes, "resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." Stay healthy.

Dear Annie: This is regarding your answer to "Child Forever," whose parents want her to live closer to home. The day our daughter was dropped off for her freshman year of college, she and I felt very much that this was a rite of passage. We had both been preparing for this last "untying," if you will (versus "cutting"). She has soared independently quite well. Yes, she's learned her life lessons, and yes, I've winced and cried with her. However, this is an adult relationship. I respect her life and expect and receive reciprocity. She is a 10-hour drive away. She has offered her home to us and made clear that she wants to be involved in our lives should we need her — and not from a selfish view that we would make good baby sitters, which you suggested to "Child Forever" about her parents. How incredibly sad that this narrow view is propagated by you! — *Mary*

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Even when the situation is far from ideal, your positive, upbeat and honest attitude will make it better. The "honest" part is key. Temper optimism with realism.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). If you take the exact path you took yesterday, you'll still learn something new. You can't help it: Your curious mind will keep seeing more and more as you relax into a routine.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Should you play dumb to avoid hurting someone's feelings or avoid a confrontation? You're too smart to do this believably, but it still might work to buy you some time in an awkward situation.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). The saying goes, "Enough is enough." While that may be true, getting to "enough" can be tricky. Usually you don't know the right amount until you've gone over it. Well, next time you can use what you know to scale it back.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). If there were some way to be certain of beauty, truth or any answer at all really, no one would still be questioning. If it has to be eternally sought, there's nothing to be found.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). It's not true that you live within the confines of your head. Context matters. You're different in different situations. Your head changes with the location and the environmental factors and influences therein.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Because you're paying such a marvelous quality of attention to all that's going on around you, what you'll learn today will make you a more discriminating and reflective person.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Too much activity can be numbing. It's like you can't tell if you're in the swing of things or just watching yourself go through the swinging motions. Either way, it's time to slow down and rest.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You'll do excellent work because of your ability to prioritize, focus and dedicate yourself to the task until it's finished. Your work ethic now compares to that of your heroes.

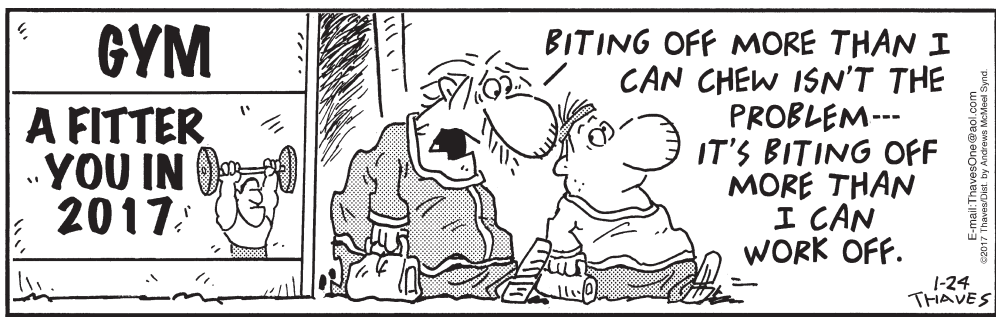
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Our feelings show up with the purpose of helping out, but they are often misguided. When negative feelings impede your progress, keep asking, "What am I telling myself that is making this difficult?"

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Just as the bees and gophers have work to do, your nature comes with a work-drive as well. Loving yourself is loving your nature and pushing yourself to fulfill the job at hand.

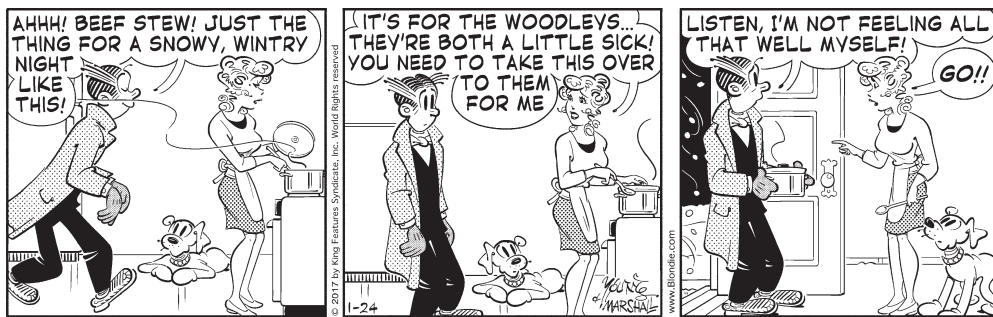
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). A person who doesn't realize that he or she is wrong will have no desire to do right. Pangs of guilt or shame could be the first sign that a person will soon be blossoming into improvement.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 25). You'll be part of a tight team this year. Furthermore, you're the reason it's tight: You're the glue. Together you'll earn a top honor in March. April and September are the best times to travel and accomplish a mission. You'll get closure on past pain in May and almost immediately a new source of joy opens. Scorpio and Gemini adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 9, 5, 14, 27 and 37.

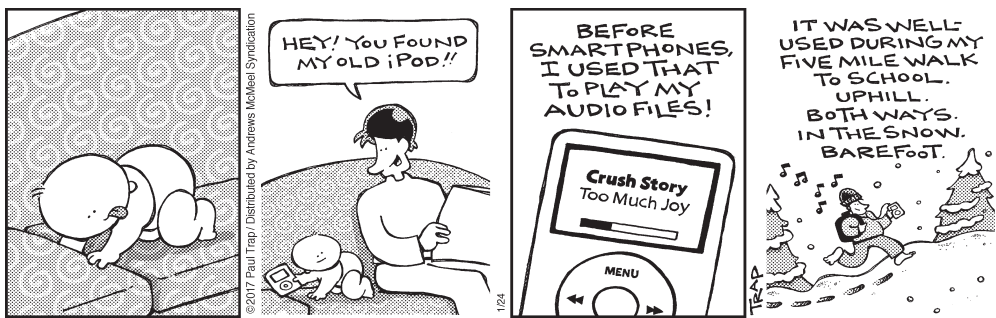
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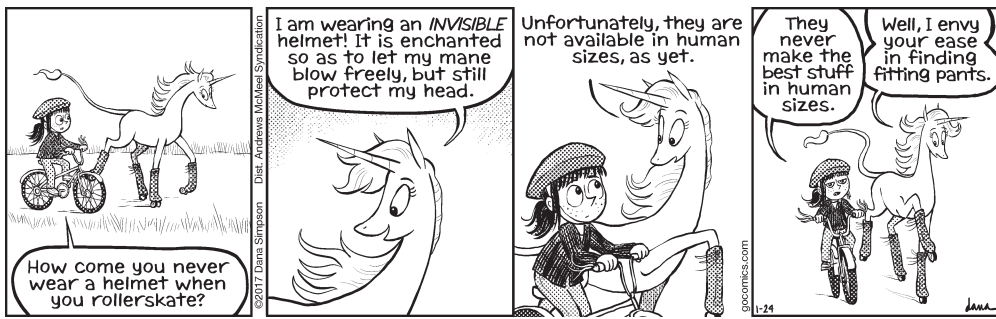
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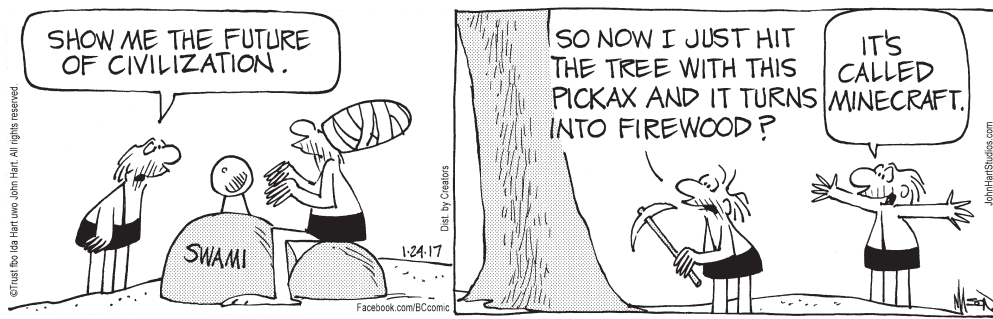
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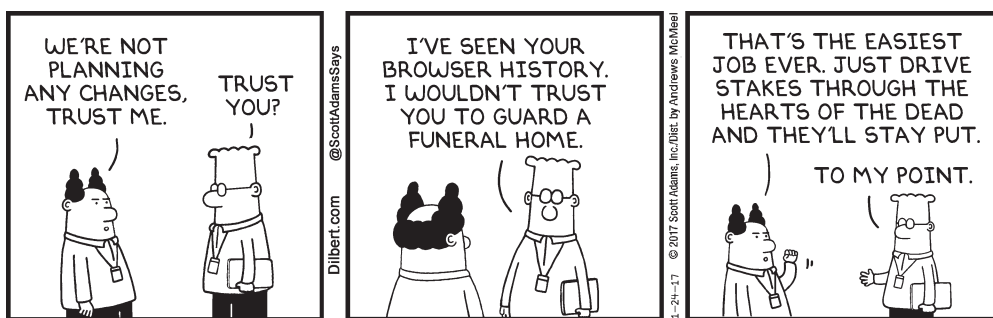
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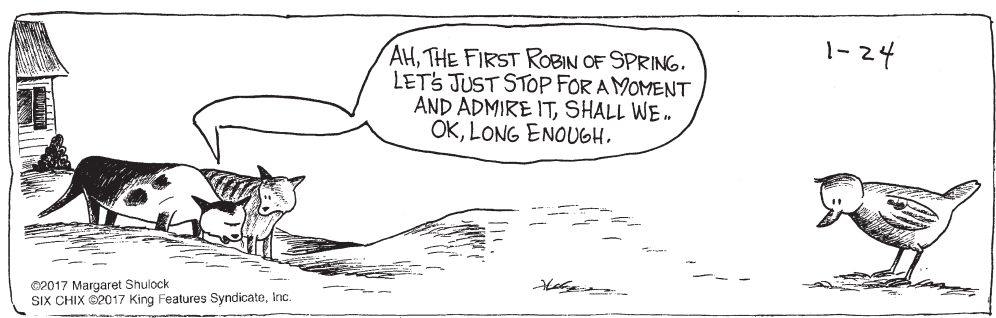
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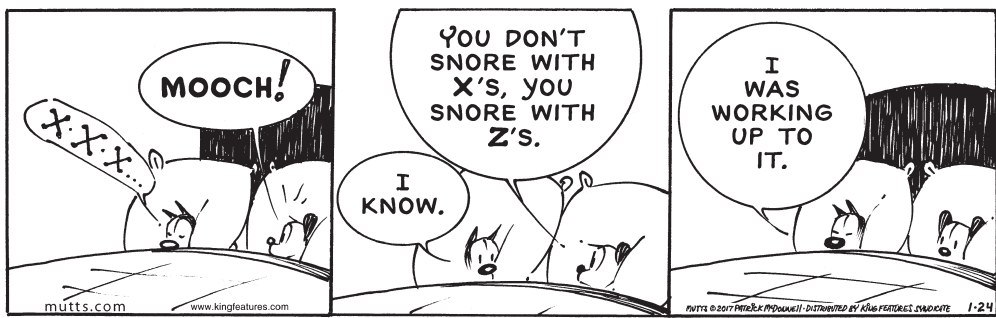
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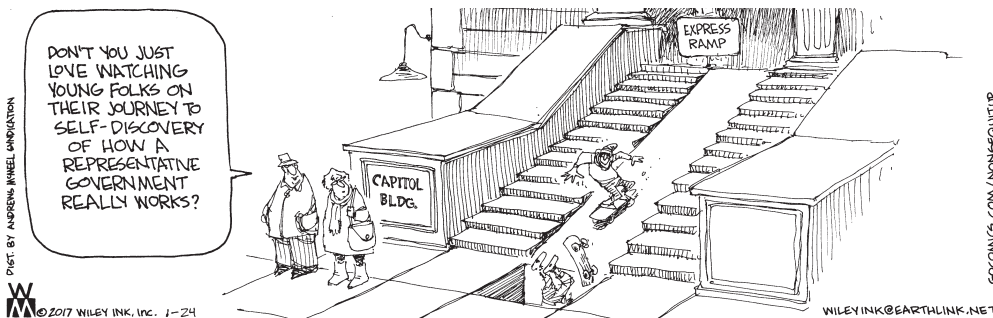
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