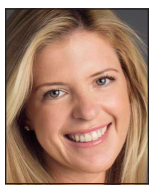
Tired of friend's complaints

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators Syndicate Inc.

Dear Annie: I'm writing to you regarding one of my best friends, "Melanie." Melanie and I are both in our late 20s. We met in college and bonded over our senses of humor and our preference for staying in and watching a movie over going out to frat parties. She's been there for me during some hard times. She's one person I can rely on to always answer my calls and be there for me, and I appreciate her.

But she seems unable or unwilling to get out of the rut she's been in for the past few years, and it's become increasingly frustrating to listen to her complaining about the same things every day. She took a retail job out of college, just to make ends meet until she could find something in her field. Five years later and she's still there, and I've had to hear about it pretty much every day.

I've tried to help her look for jobs and sent her lots of links to job postings, but I'm pretty sure she hasn't actually applied to any of them. She always has a list of reasons — e.g., "I don't have time to apply for jobs," "I need to update my resume." She tends to play the victim in a lot of areas of her life.

And that's part of why I'm scared to confront her. I want to tell her that she's been talking about these same problems for years and it's time to change, but I know she'd be offended.

Lately, I find myself screening her phone calls because when I get home from a long day of work, I just don't want to hear the negativity. I feel bad for avoiding her. I want to be a good friend. What should I do? — *Emotionally Exhausted*

Dear Emotionally: It's frustrating to watch a friend languishing in a rut that she could easily climb out of. But if you tried to yank her out of it, she'd only pull you down into the wallowing hole with her, and that would be a toxic place to be. So keep a healthy distance between you and that aspect of her, not just for your sake but also for hers; by listening to her venting about the same problems every day, you're actually enabling her not to change.

So draw the line. Tell her your New Year's resolution is to not dwell on negatives. Whenever she starts up the "woe is me" routine, tell her that you're happy to discuss solutions but if she just wants to talk about the same problems again, you're not able to listen. Eventually — let's hope — she'll get out of that rut all on her own. That will give her the self-confidence to keep the momentum going.

Dear Annie: Your answer to "Worried About Mom," who is looking out for his or her elderly mother and trying to protect her finances, perpetuates a misunderstanding about power of attorney. Someone's having power of attorney does not allow him or her to take control of the other person's checking account as you said. Power of attorney allows someone to do things for the other person — "for" being the operative word there; it can't be against the person's will. In this case, "Worried About Mom's" power of attorney cannot stop his or her mother from giving money to the ne'er-do-well sister. Having the mother found incompetent and obtaining a legal guardianship would be the only thing that could do that. — *Heard It All Before in Lafayette, Ind.*

Dear Heard: Thank you for your insight. I encourage anyone in such a situation to consult an attorney for proper legal advice.

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Collaborate. The compromise you strike will be worth it, as long as you approach it like an experiment. What can you discover by working with others that you could not find out by working on your own?

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). You're in the mood to uncover a mystery. It seems by now something would have come along to pique your interest. Alas, you're going to have to go searching for new inspiration, unanswered questions and purposeful quests.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Optimum productivity isn't really about how much you get done; it's about getting the right things done — the things that matter to you, make a difference to others and possibly enrich and improve your overall experience.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). The beautiful thing about a fantasy life is that it can be anything you want it to be and, no matter how big and wild it grows, it can always stay contained in your head and completely portable, with you wherever you go.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Your wish will be granted precisely as asked. This will inspire you, in the future, to ask in even more specific terms. You're getting better and better at accepting help, by the way.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). If you're wondering why you can't seem to give a care about the work at hand, it's because the stakes aren't high enough to motivate you. So make it more fun. Impose a severe limit or an outrageous reward.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Though you may fantasize about making a drastic change, the reality is that a series of small steps will get you there with more grace, stability and certainty.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You have no interest in making a "good" impression. You want it to be spectacular. You want them to be thinking of you long after you're gone. If anyone can cast such a spell, it's you. Restraint and a sense of mystery are key.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You're in danger of digital overload. Try this radical idea: real life! Meet in person. Tell the joke or the story to someone's face. The payoff for actual human contact will be brilliant.

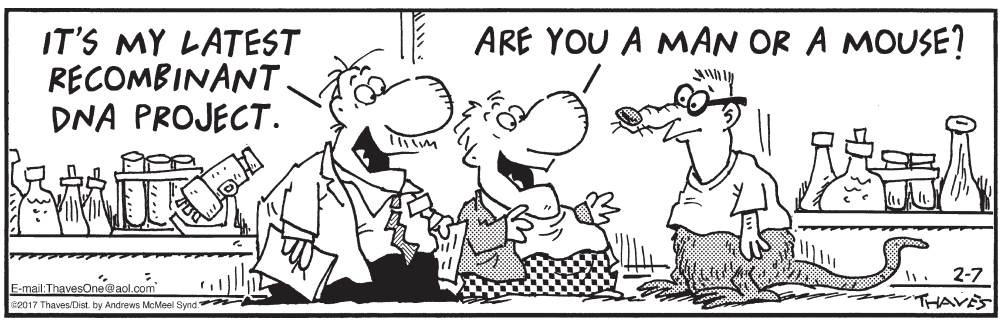
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). The one you interact with most, in your head or otherwise, is the one you're having a relationship with. The dynamic doesn't have to be positive for it to be meaningful.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). The journey ahead gets increasingly interesting and demanding, too. Answer the challenge by planning to get more sleep. You'll need to be sharp, and sleep deprivation will only lead to mistakes.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Your patience is legendary, and you'll stick with the program, person or project long after others would have given up. Your intuition tells you to hang in there, and it won't steer you wrong.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Feb. 8). People want to know you and be a part of your team this year, not because of what you can do for them but because of who you are. Your talents are a perfect match for the March agenda. August shifts the energy to your physical self, and you'll get stronger and fitter. Leo and Sagittarius adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 9, 4, 20, 44 and 17.

FRANK AND ERNEST



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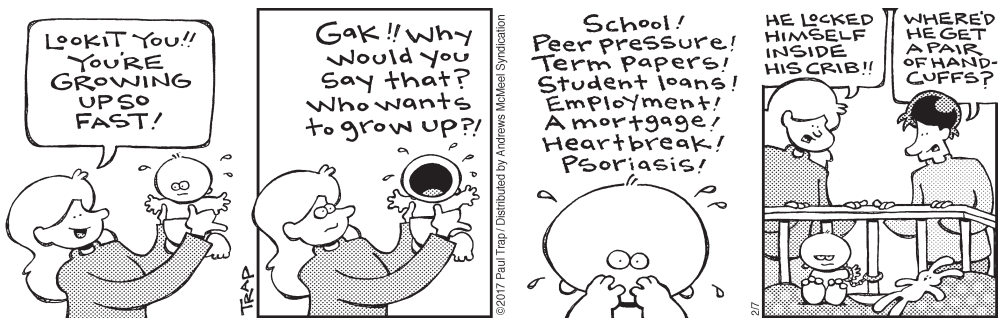

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PHOEBE AND HER UNICORN

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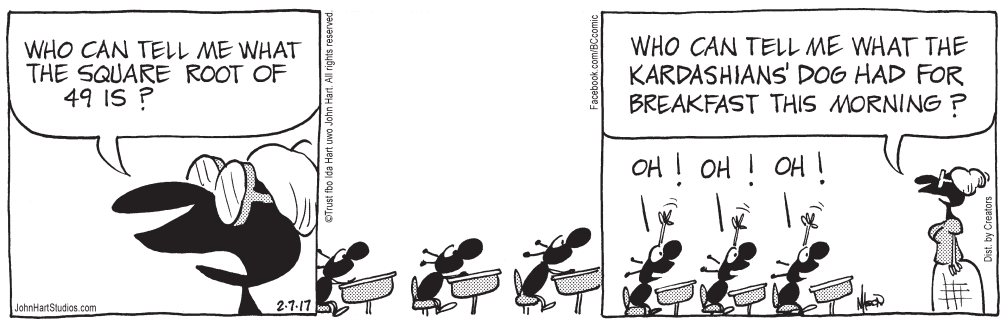

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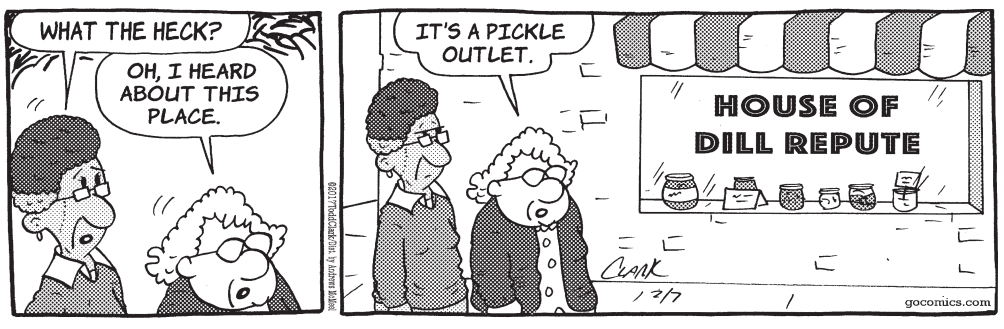

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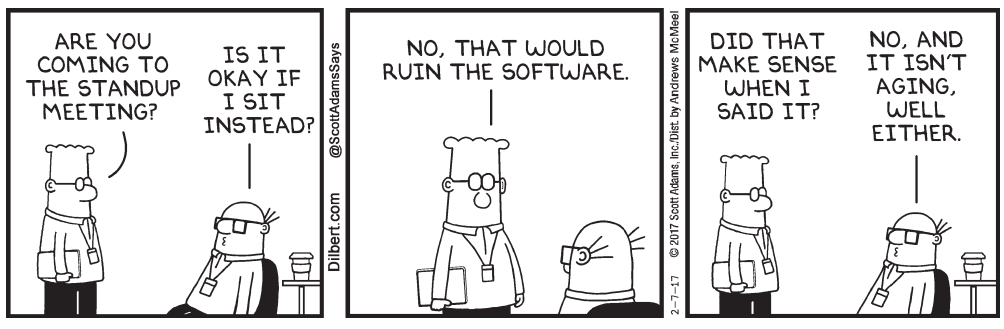

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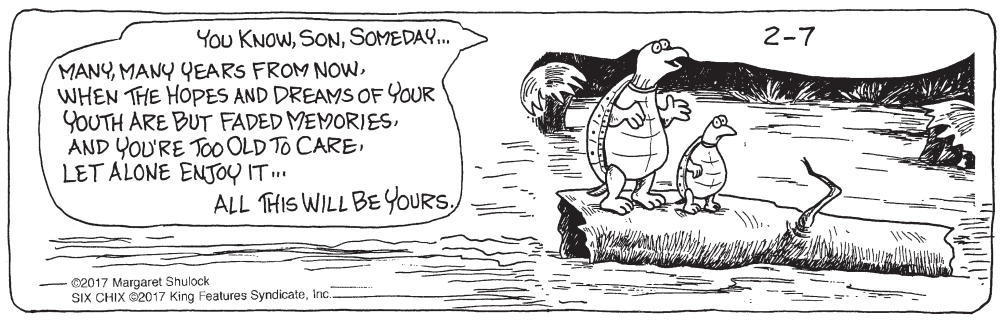

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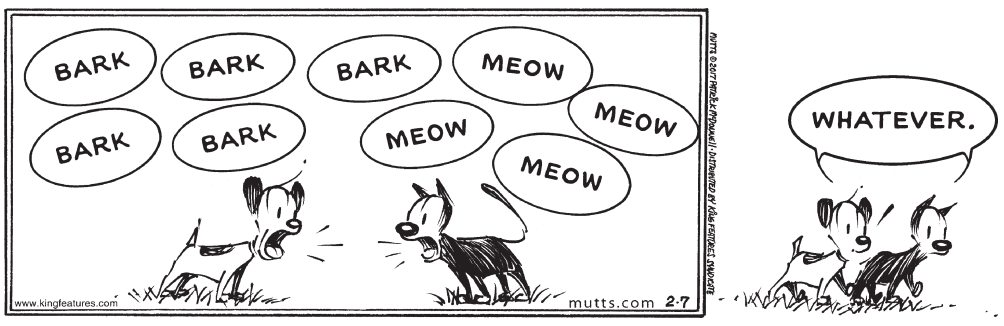

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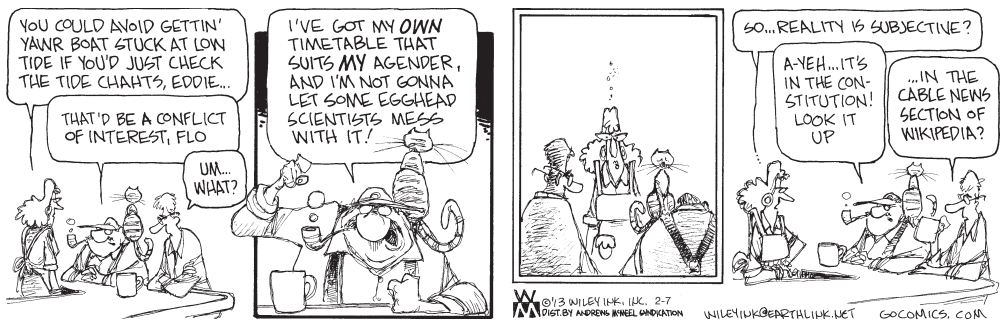

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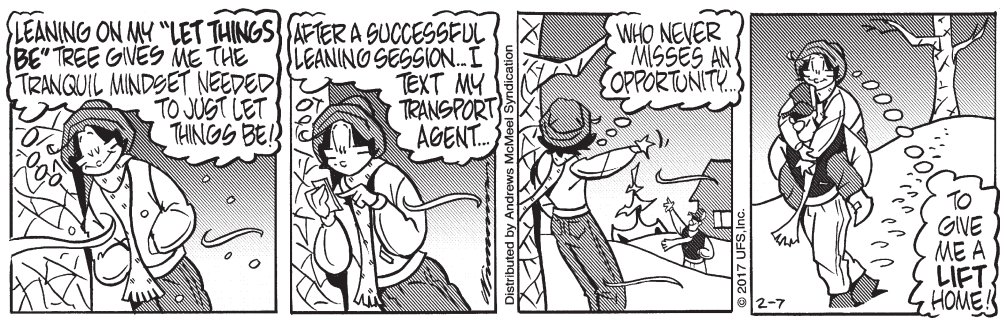
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