

Stepmother calls it quits

Dear Annie: This is my 36th year as a stepmother, and I am writing in hopes of helping others who are taking the huge step of blending families. My husband, "Nelson," had custody of his two children, a boy and girl, who were in their early teens when we started dating. Nelson's ex lived far away, so there were no weekend visits with their mom. Nelson became sick within our first year of dating and relied on me to help with his kids and household so that he could continue to work.

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
Syndicate Inc.

It was apparent from the start that his children were damaged. They were resentful of me and acted out. Years later, after we were married, I found out that Nelson's children had been molested by their maternal grandfather for several years and that nothing had been done about it. His children didn't have counseling and never learned to deal with their feelings about the sexual abuse. Today they are grown adults with children of their own. They still refuse any counseling. I feel that Nelson's kids treat

me the way they do because it's easier than dealing with their parents. I recently decided that I am removing myself from my husband's children's and grandchildren's lives. I am mourning the loss of eight people in my life but have determined that it is less painful to live my life without them in it than to feel the pain of never meeting their expectations.

Here is my step-parenting advice: Do not discipline your stepchildren. Be their friend — just because you can! When they're small, keep them safe and report anything that doesn't look right. Be a soft place to fall, because they will need it. If your spouse isn't stepping up to the plate on their behalf, talk privately with your spouse about it. If your spouse is resistant to doing anything to change the situation, walk away, because it never gets better.

As the saying goes, "you teach people how to treat you." I get that now! — *No Longer a Stepparent*

Dear No Longer: Though I

appreciate your advice to step-parents — and that last bit is one of my favorite axioms — I can't help but wonder whether your severing ties was a little too severe here. You seem to have a good grasp of the way abuse has affected these children and grandchildren. As long as they are not being verbally abusive to you, perhaps you could practice healthy detachment without completely cutting off all communication. You can build an emotional shield around yourself without having it be a wall.

Dear Annie: In response to "Fed Up," whose co-worker always comments on her meal choices, I'd like to say that it's quite possible the co-worker has an eating disorder. My cousin constantly remarks on my food choices, and I finally realized that her own eating issues are at the heart of her comments and that she is looking for attention about how "healthy" her own food choices are. — *Been There*

Dear Been There: You could very well be right. Rather than be defensive when someone fixates on our food choices, perhaps we should be concerned for the person.

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). To exercise restraint will require much more energy than it does to react to every trigger or follow every impulse, but restraint will pay you back, save you from trouble and help you focus well.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Carbon can be black under some circumstances (coal) and clear under others (diamond). And you, carbon-based being, are similarly flexible, with the ability to arrange yourself to be experienced in different ways.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). There are so many legitimate evils in the world that it would be a shame to waste energy warring against imaginary ones. You'll apply yourself to real things and make a real difference.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You ask questions in order to learn more about the world. Beware: Many people do not ask questions for this reason. Their questions are pointed toward getting the answer that will prove their correctness.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). You and your friend agree on many things, which is why you're better off as friends than you would be as business partners or leaders. Diversity is germane to growth.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You're in the mood for something you might not be able to afford. As your sign mate Dorothy Parker suggested, "Take care of the luxuries and the necessities will take care of themselves."

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). When you have the right goal for you, hard work will eventually overcome hard luck. This is true today; it will also be true tomorrow and all the days after that.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). What is not in the world that should be in the world? This is the question you ask yourself today, and it will continue driving you through the next several weeks as you shift your focus to a new project.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Your influence will be a function of how well you accommodate others. Make it easy for people to do the thing you really want them to do. This is the secret to success in many areas.

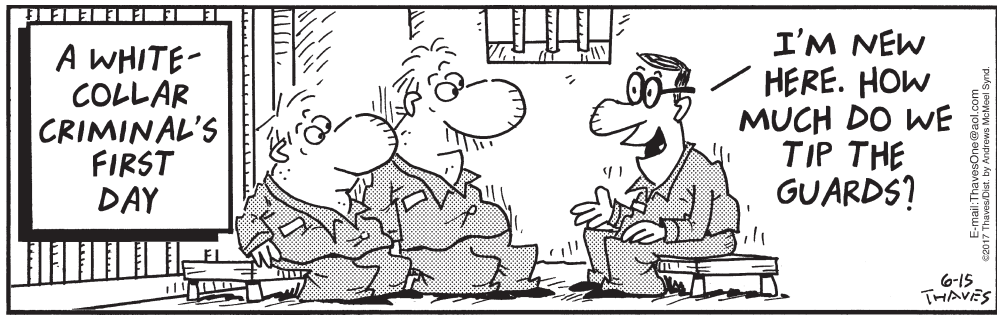
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). How wonderful to be both generous and charitable if you are able. But if you have to choose just one, choose generosity, which will stretch your heart and its capacity for joy and compassion.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). It's good to be happy, but it's a tricky thing to strive for. The pursuit of happiness often backfires. You're better off applying yourself to work you find meaningful or making a contribution to something you believe in.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You do the right thing because it's the right thing to do, not because it will look good in the pictures, sound good in the history books or because someone will tell on you if you don't.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (June 16). You'll start this solar return embodying peace, love and understanding. July brings the cash infusion you need for a special project. The next three months solidify a key relationship. September's tools and connections update daily life and business. December shows you a different way to make money. Pisces and Capricorn adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 5, 20, 18, 40 and 11.

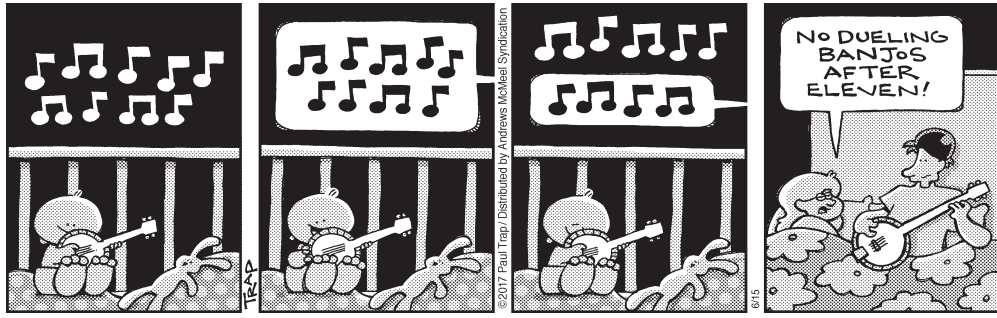
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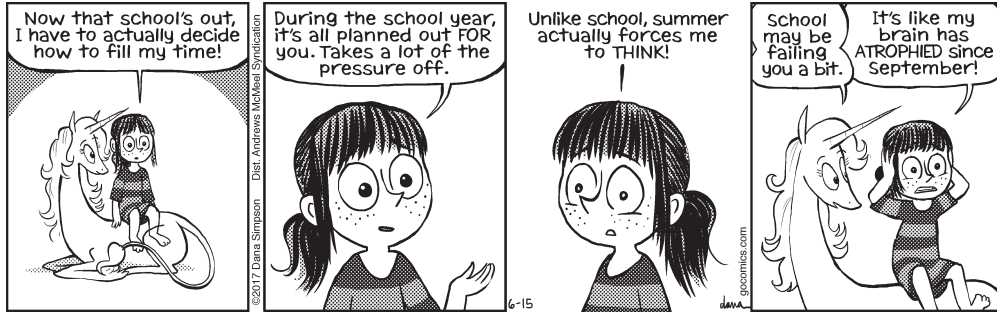
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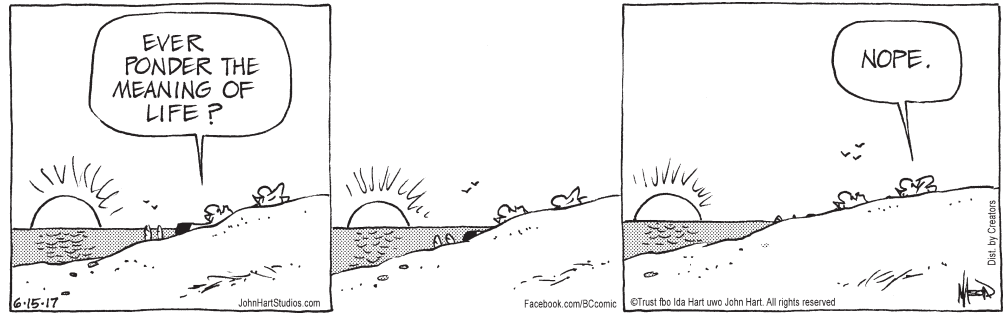
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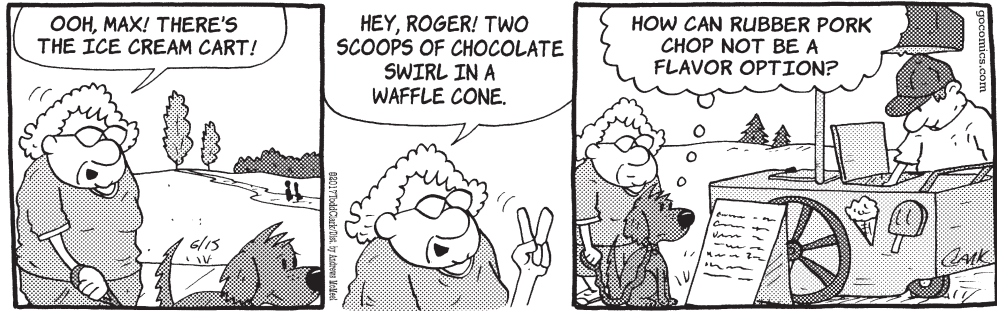
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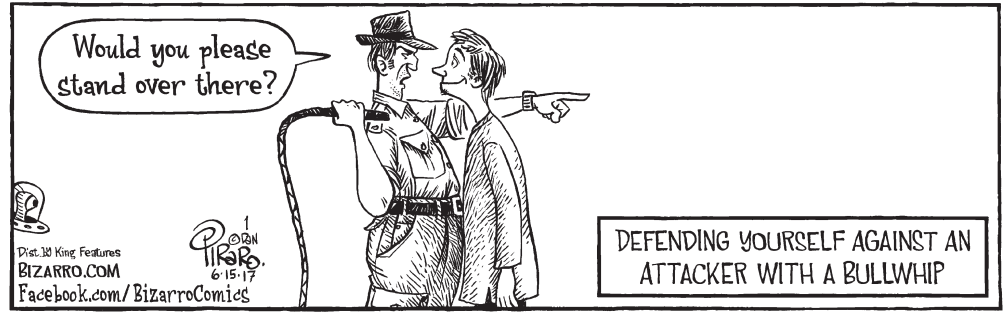
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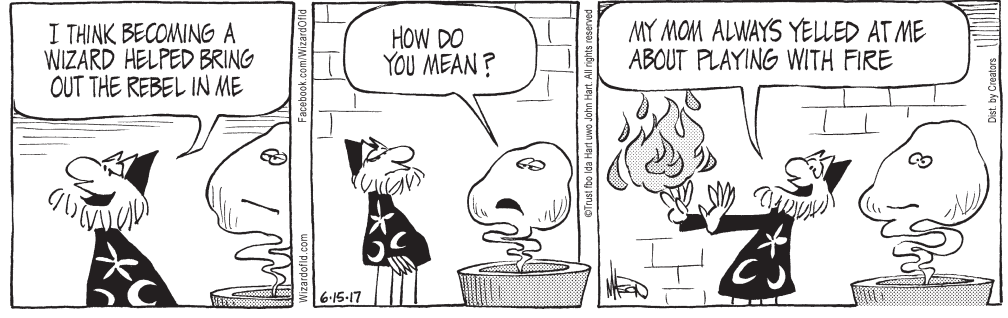
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