

Poem for brand new drivers

Dear Annie: Your predecessor Ann Landers published a poem called "Dead at Seventeen" to get the attention of new drivers and impress upon them the dangers and responsibilities of driving a car. Might you have that on file somewhere? I have a 17-year-old granddaughter with a new driver's license, whom I'd like to see it. — Shirley in Indiana

Dear Shirley: This poem has been making an impression on teens for decades now and is as relevant as ever. Here it is. "Dead at Seventeen," by John Berrio

Agony claws my mind. I am a statistic. When I first got here I felt very much alone. I was overwhelmed by grief, and I expected to find sympathy. I found no sympathy. I saw only thousands of others whose bodies were as badly mangled as mine. I was given a number and placed in a category. The category was called "Traffic Fatalities."

The day I died was an ordinary school day. How I wish I had taken the bus! But I was too cool for the bus. I remember how I wheedled the car out of Mom.

"Special favor," I pleaded. "All the kids drive." When the 2:50 p.m. bell rang, I threw my books in the locker... free until tomorrow morning! I ran to the parking lot, excited at the thought of driving a car and being my own boss.

It doesn't matter how the accident happened. I was goofing off — going too fast, taking crazy chances. But I was enjoying my freedom and having fun. The last thing I remember was passing an old lady who seemed to be going awfully slow. I heard a crash and felt a terrific jolt. Glass and steel flew everywhere. My whole body seemed to be turning inside out. I heard myself scream.

Suddenly, I awakened. It was very quiet. A police officer was standing over me. I saw a doctor. My body was mangled. I was saturated with blood. Pieces of jagged glass were sticking out all over. Strange that I couldn't feel anything. Hey, don't pull that sheet over my head. I can't be dead. I'm only 17. I've got a date tonight. I'm supposed to have a wonderful life ahead of me. I haven't lived yet. I can't be dead.

Later I was placed in a drawer. My folks came to identify me. Why did they have to see me like this? Why did I have to look at Mom's eyes when she faced the most terrible ordeal of her life? Dad suddenly looked very old. He told the man in charge, "Yes, he's our son."

The funeral was weird. I saw all my relatives and friends walk toward the casket. They looked at me with the saddest eyes I've ever seen. Some of my buddies were crying. A few of the girls touched my hand and sobbed as they walked by. Please, somebody — wake me up! Get me out of here. I can't bear to see Mom and Dad in such pain. My grandparents are so weak from grief they can barely walk. My brother and sister are like zombies. They move like robots. In a daze. Everybody. No one can believe this. I can't believe it, either.

Please, don't bury me! I'm not dead! I have a lot of living to do! I want to laugh and run again. I want to sing and dance. Please don't put me in the ground! I promise if you give me just one more chance, God, I'll be the most careful driver in the whole world. All I want is one more chance. Please, God, I'm only 17.

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
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TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). It's a day for sweeping reform of small areas of your life — as in closet-size or drawer-size areas. It will be surprising how much a total reorganization of a cupboard or a wallet can rock your world.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). It's only natural to become bored with things that stay the same for too long. Then again, when change is constant, change is the state that becomes boring. Take this into account as you plan your next move.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). If you're feeling adventurous, the best jewels of the day can be mined in the caves of uncertainty, risk and experimentation. So take courage and dig deeper. It will be worth it.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). In a certain area of your life, usual rules won't seem to apply anymore. Maybe your group imposed these guidelines before you ever even had a chance to hold them up to the light; to test them; to wonder if you agree.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Your cosmic gift will be a special charisma. Don't be surprised if those closest to you don't notice it, though. Familiarity breeds blindness. It's your acquaintances and the total strangers around who will warm to you.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Momentum is about decisive action. The excitement of a game could help, especially with the right opponent. Unless you are competing against someone much younger or weaker than you, don't hold back. Give it all you've got.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Whoever said that calendars are for careful people? No way! They are for people who want to make their dreams come true and also want to keep a record so

later they can remember how they did it. Mark up your calendar.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). No one has it all figured out. No one! So don't plunk down a bunch of money for the answer to your life. Now, a reasonable sum for the answer to a certain problem... well, that's different and totally worth the money today.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You show up to work even when you don't feel like it, but to attend social functions out of a sense of duty is not advised. If you're not into it, it's better not to commit yourself. People need to feel liked, not tolerated.

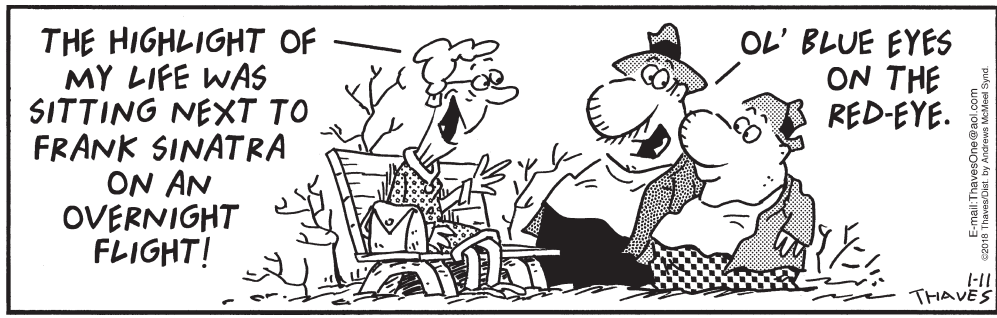
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). To know there's a difference between what things are and what they could be is the unique privilege and pain of human existence. You'll make the most of this today. Celebrate every nudge in the right direction, however small.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Your escapes will bring you great pleasure. Traveling? A show? Reading? Indulge! As Groucho Marx said, "Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read."

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). The wise and the strong are often merciful too — at least enough so to forgive every person once or twice. More than that and maybe they aren't so wise and strong after all.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 12). Lucky projects will be your bounty! Because you love the job at hand, you pour yourself into the details, creating as much perfection as you can. You'll cement a stellar deal in April. You'll be applauded by community in July. There's a healing in October. Pisces and Virgo adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 44, 49, 4, 17 and 28.

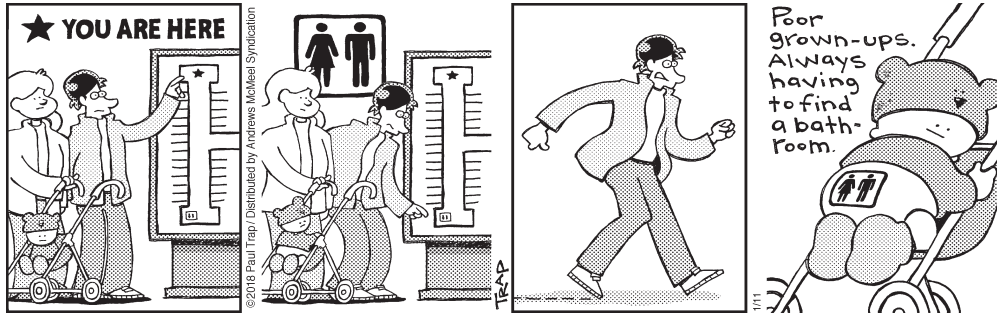
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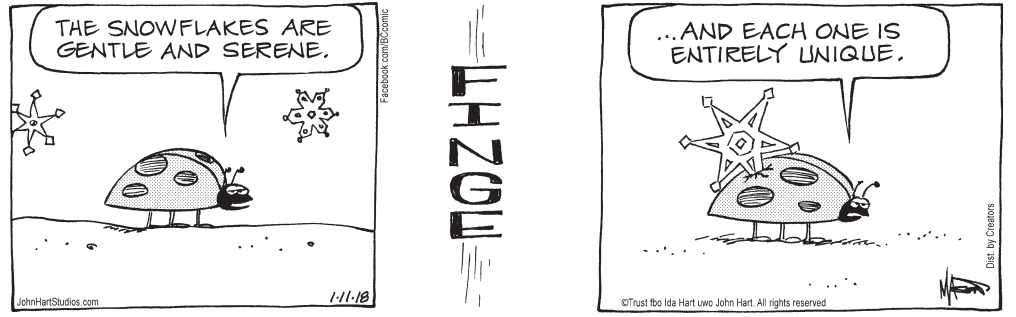
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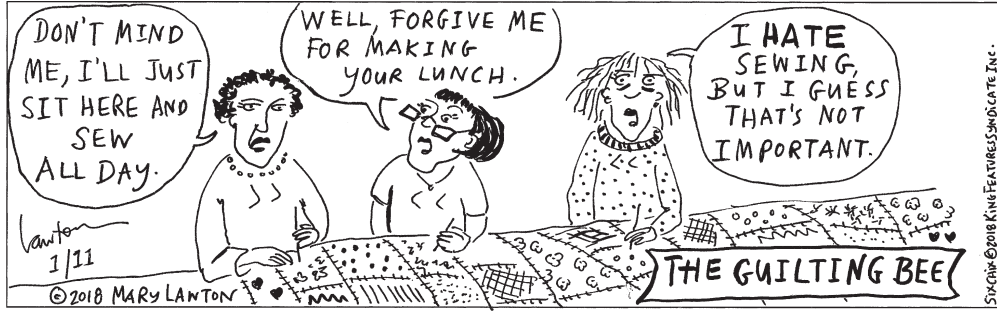
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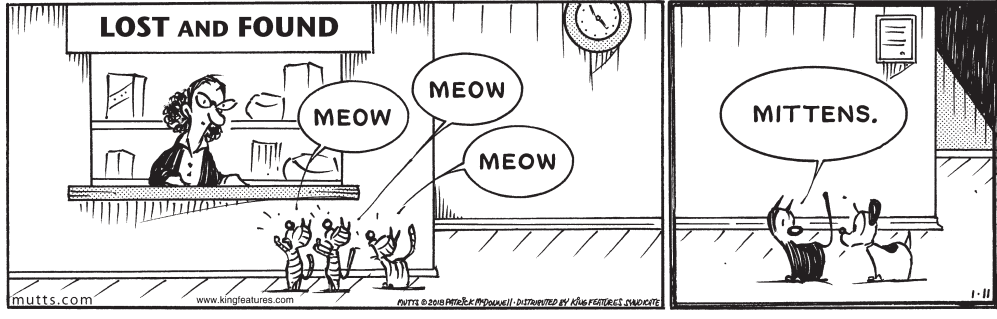
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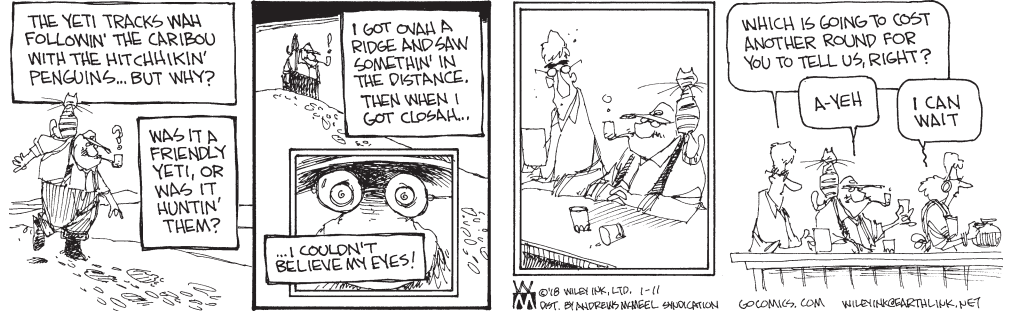
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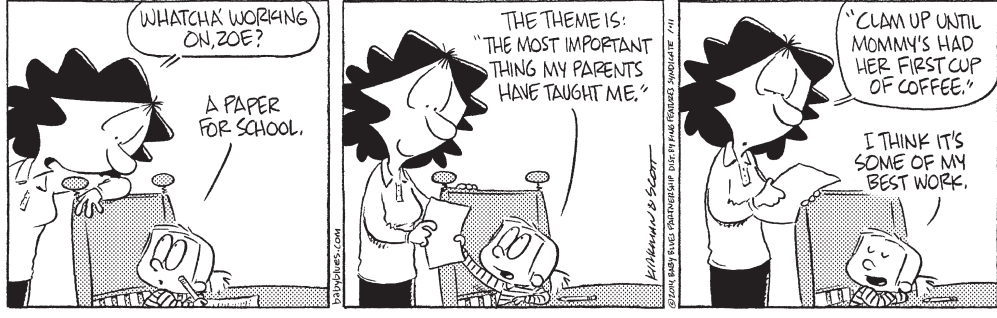
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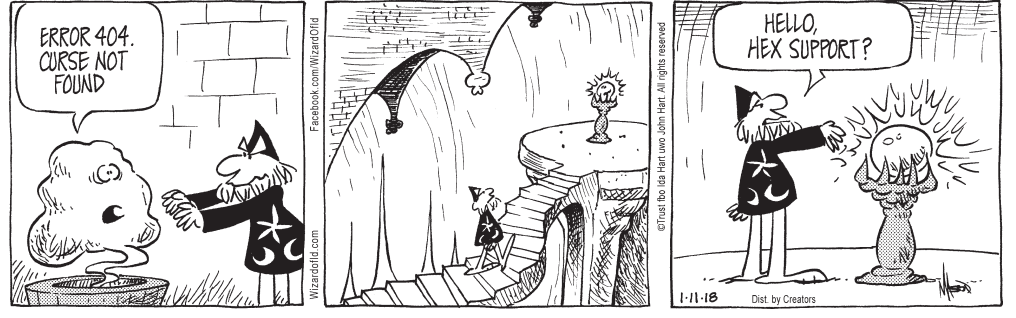
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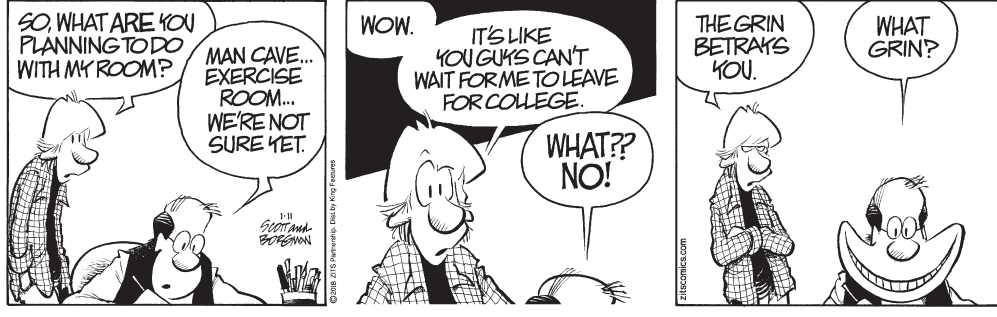
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