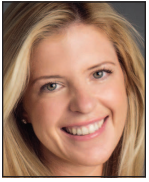


My toxic family members

Dear Annie: I am a 50-year-old married woman with two children. I am far from perfect, but I do feel I am a decent person. My issue is my sister and my mom. I have spent most of my adult life trying to please both of them. I walk on eggshells every time we have a family function, because I never know what I've done that they will be upset about. The latest blowup was because I suggested a different Christmas game. I was yelled at by my sister in front of my parents and grandma, and they all sat there and let her rip me to shreds. I think they are afraid of her, too.

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
Syndicate Inc.

One year, she screamed at me because I couldn't pick up a birthday cake for another family member because I had to be out of town for a few hours. That same week, my mom screamed at me for a half-hour while I was at work, all because I couldn't make this relative's birthday supper. I plan and organize family birthdays, get-togethers, etc., but my mom and sister come late, pick fights and make me feel terrible. They don't like my friends

and tell me so. They have made fun of my hair color, my makeup, my weight, the fact that my house is clean — you name it! To them, any part of my life or personality is fair game for attack.

They once took my son when he was small and drove him around and grilled him because they thought he was being abused. He had fallen and hit his face on a bleacher at the pool. My mom was there and saw the whole thing happen but pretended not to know. I worked for Child Protective Services at the time and was humiliated. But thank goodness, my son and I were interviewed, so we could prove nothing bad had happened.

What do I do? I make myself sick trying to please these two. I make myself sick thinking I should cut the ties. Any suggestions? Talking to them doesn't work. — *Sick of Them*

Dear Sick of Them: You're making yourself sick; you can also make yourself better. Stop trying to please your mom and sister. In fact, stop trying to please

anyone. Act out of integrity and with love and respect for yourself. Take a break from seeing or communicating with your relatives for a while. Think of it as a detox. Then, with a more clear-headed perspective, decide what level of relationship you can have with them while still protecting yourself. You may indeed need to cut ties, or you may just need to limit the frequency and duration of visits. As you seem to have internalized a lot of guilt, consider enlisting the help of a therapist for constructing and placing boundaries.

Dear Annie: I had a friend who went through a tough breakup last year, and I was there for her every day. This year, I find myself going through something similar, but she's too busy with her new boyfriend to answer the phone when I call, I guess. Why is it that so many people want your companionship during rocky periods but can't be there for you when you're in need? — *Bitter*

Dear Bitter: The hard times are great for showing you who your real friends are. This woman is not one of them. Don't be bitter. Do find better friends.

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Aesthetic choices are never really correct or incorrect. There's not one right way things should appear. So work on such matters using the sensibility that best represents your attractions, preferences and delight.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). If you demand a little more of your conversations, you'll get a lot of fun, insight and creative inspiration out of them. But you have to be willing to focus on the other person, staying alert to the openings that lead a little deeper.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Ambition can be an energizing force, but it can also be the thief of contentment. There's a balance to be struck today so that you may swing into the future while holding firmly to the handles of satisfaction with the present.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). You are emotionally invested in something that would otherwise be a very clinical process. Rather ordinary daily happenings will present a magic opportunity for you to feel and make other people feel.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). The subject line is the trickiest part of email. Your point, in and of itself, may not be juicy enough to get someone to open and read on. That sums up all communication today. To get heard will require thought and pizzazz.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Your version of a good result may not match up with another person's. Chances are, your standards are higher or just very different. Therefore it will be important to make your expectations known up front.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You can't assume that people know what you're all about. This is true even for people who, by now, really should.

You'll have to fill in the blanks today by giving lots of context. This is a chance for fun and self-discovery.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You've seen it time and again. Frustration and anger at others is really anger with the self. It's easier to see when you're not the one who is mad. Either way, you'll grow from today's realization.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Start the story from the beginning, and take your time in the telling. People will be really interested in you today and will want the chance to be fully entertained by you.

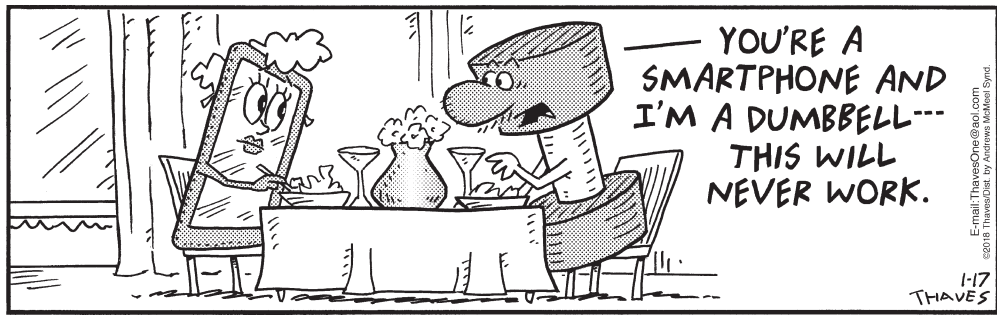
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Practice your charm with strangers. It will be easier than using it with people you know, because there's no build-up of expectation and you won't be worried about forgetting a name or some key piece of information.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). "Well, actually," they say when they are about to point out how wrong the other person is. This is annoying, at best, and can be downright combative, so try to ignore it when you hear it.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Keep building your way forward, trying new things, introducing unlikely elements and basically taking an experimental approach to life. You might feel childish and foolish before you ultimately feel victorious.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 18). Your influence will grow through this solar return. People will accept your help, act on your advice and become successful in ways that benefit themselves and you, too. There's a breakthrough in March, and the opportunities get challenging and magical. Invest in April. Your creativity will shine. How gratifying! Libra and Pisces adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 6, 40, 1, 28 and 31.

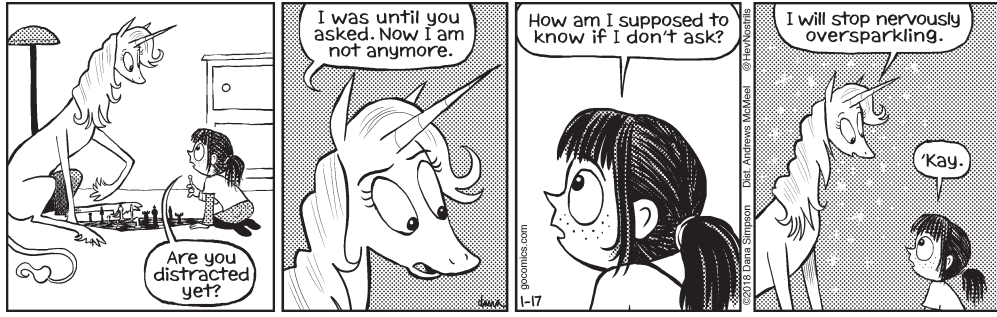
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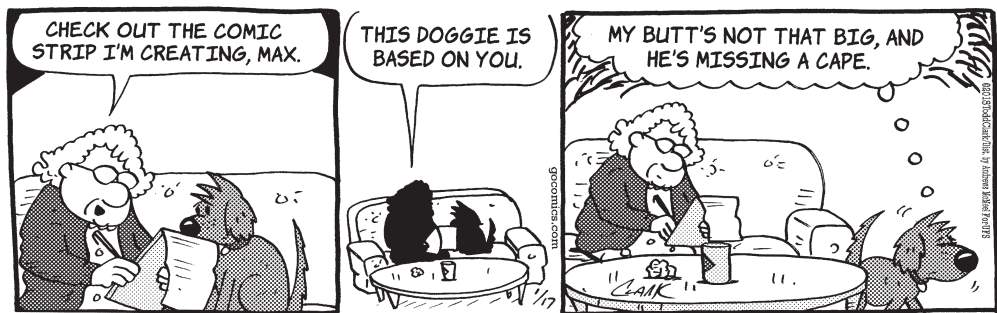
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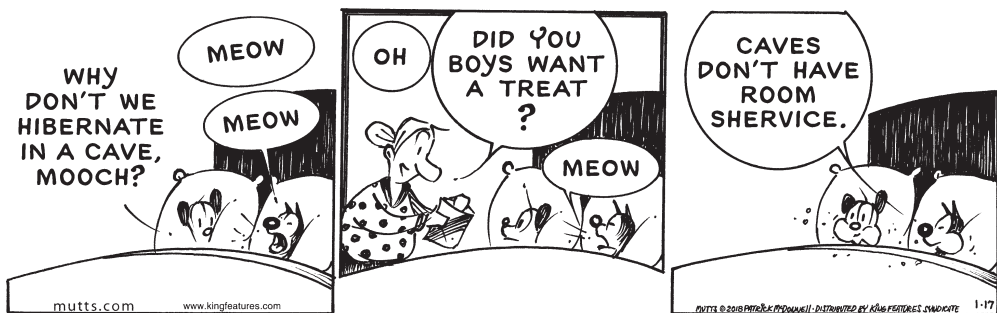
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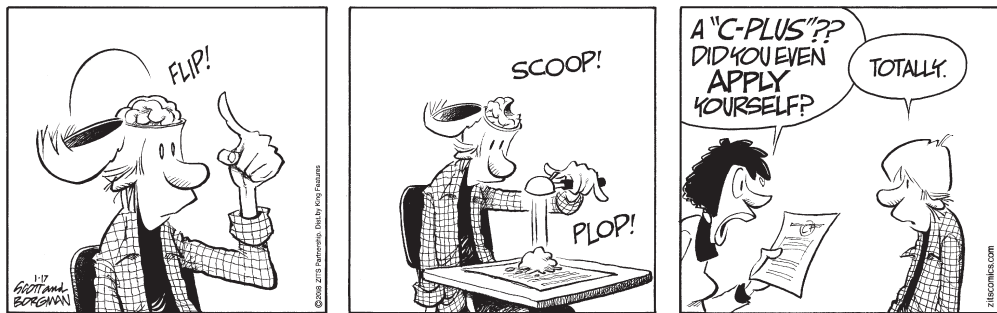
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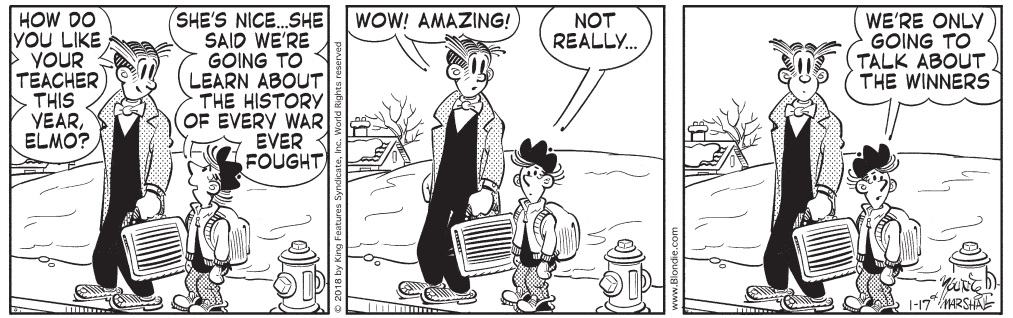
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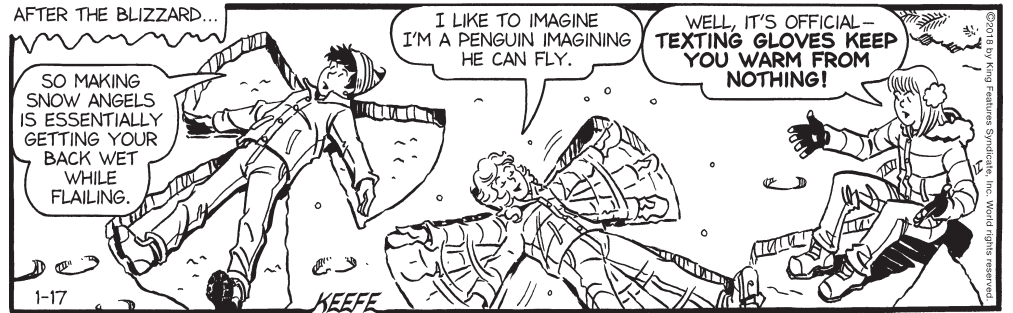
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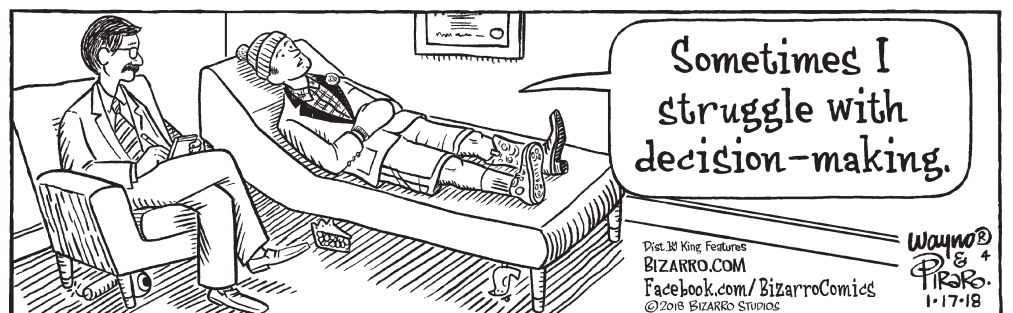
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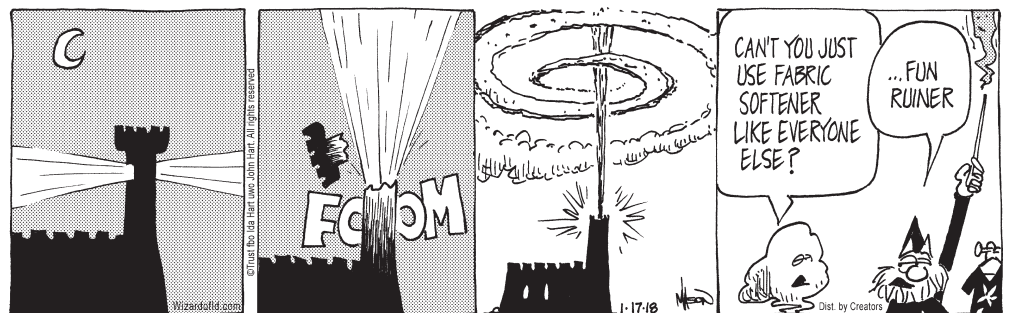
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