

The joy of comparing

Dear Annie: I read your column daily and always like your tough love and sensible advice. I'm interested in what your advice would be in the following situation. It involves gift giving at Christmas for nieces and nephews. My daughter does not feel that her brother gave as much to her sons as she did to his daughter and two stepchildren. She feels she was far more generous than he was. I understand that this is not my problem but am curious about what your advice would be to her. Expense is not an issue. Also, my son's wife does not involve herself in shopping for gifts for his nephews. It may be that men just shop differently than women. — *Dreading Next Christmas*

Dear Dreading Next Christmas: I think that if your daughter is going to get out the abacus and compare receipts, she and your son ought to just skip buy-

ing presents for each other's children next year. Instead, the children could do a secret Santa among themselves — crafting gifts or using allowance money to buy small items, depending on their ages — so that they might learn the joy of giving.

Dear Annie: I have an 88-year-old friend who can't hear and refuses to get tested for a hearing aid. I have talked with her many times about this situation, but she either makes excuses about her hearing problem or gets angry and refuses to discuss the issue. She just smiles and nods when people try to talk to her or tells them she can't understand them. Talking on the phone with her is impossible. And her hearing problem has gotten her into trouble when she's at appointments with doctors, as she sometimes misses what they tell her.

The cost is not an issue, because she could easily

afford hearing aids, and I have offered to drive her to any appointments. You cannot have a conversation with her, and she is becoming more isolated and distracted in her interactions with others. I am losing patience with her. Help! — *Frustrated Friend*

Dear Frustrated Friend: Denial can be a dangerous coping mechanism, but it's a coping mechanism nonetheless — so your friend will cling to it until she's ready to let go. Continue encouraging her to get her hearing tested, and even suggest getting your own hearing checked at the same time. If she were to feel less singled out, she might feel less defensive and more open to the idea. There are some rudimentary hearing tests available online. You could pull one up on your phone, tablet or computer the next time you're together. These online tests are no substitute for medical attention, of course, but might be a good first step to get her moving in the right direction.

DEAR ANNIE

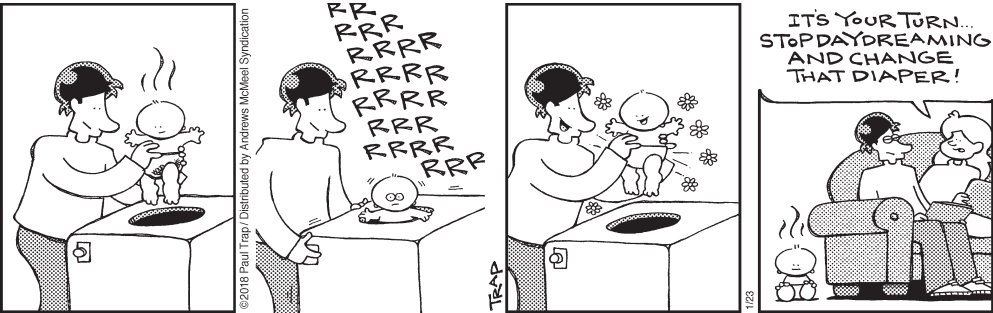


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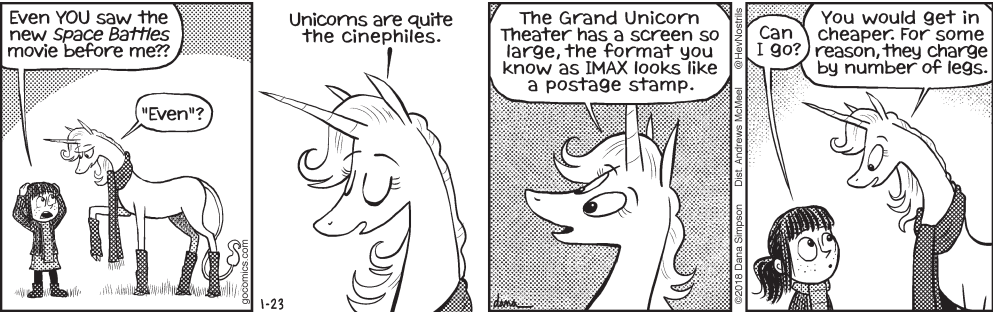
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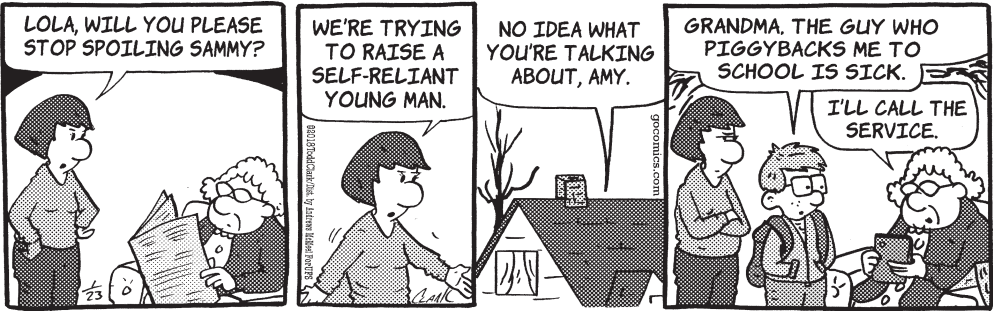
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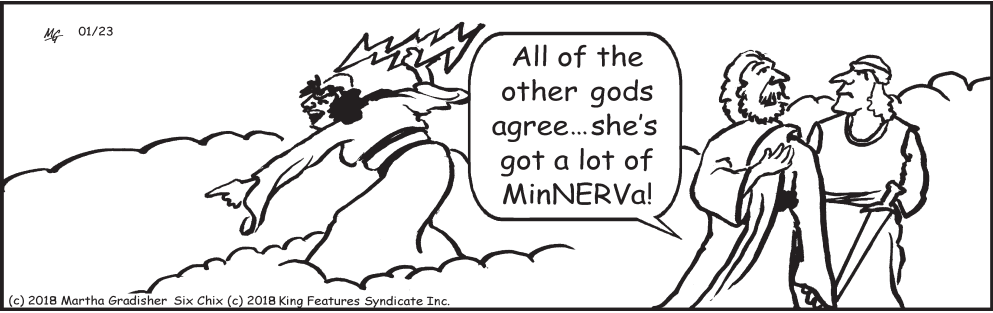
PHOEBE AND HER UNICORN



LOLA



SIX CHIX



MUTTS



BABY BLUES



ZITS



TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Of course you have more power than you are exercising, but you wisely weigh the consequences of each action. True influence isn't about what you can get people to do; it's about what you can inspire them to want to do.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). The absence of a person can be a presence — a presence so strong it dominates the room, the hour, the talk and the feeling of the day. This is how humans can transcend the apparent laws of space and time.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). You'll be the one with the cool news soon enough. Today you'll get a chance to practice reacting to the cool news of others. In a way, you're modeling the reaction you'd like to get when it's your turn to be the messenger.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). Setting yourself up for success will be a matter of casting the right people in the right roles of your life. You need someone to impress, someone to learn from and someone to cheer you on.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). You'll talk on a number of broad topics and make people laugh, too. But your secret to relating to people is not in expressing yourself exceptionally well; rather, it is in observing exceptionally well.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). If it's true that the external circumstances somehow exist to balance and harmonize what's going on inside you, you should be able to change your interior world through a rearrangement of your environment.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). It is your desire to be a delight to others. You won't have to do too much to achieve this effect — maybe slightly more than your usual self-care and making an effort to put

yourself in their presence. That's it!

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). "How my achievements mock me!" said one character in a Shakespeare play. It's also the sentiment of everyone who's ever done something remarkable and been daunted by the prospect of repeating it.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Because you know yourself well, you will see the world with greater accuracy. You can take your strengths and failings out of the equation and try for an unbiased view, to whatever extent that is possible.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Plant your affection and something will grow. Maybe it won't be what you expected. Every location is different, and some ground is more fertile than other ground. But something will come of it.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). To think deeply into seemingly shallow things is the tendency shared by poets and storytellers, mystics, inventors, designers and pied pipers of all sorts. Caution: Some frivolous wastes of time really are just that. Be discerning.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). You can't learn what you already know. This is why you might have to kick around some of the beliefs and stories inside your head to see how sound they really are. Believing in untrue things can prevent future learning.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Jan. 24). You'll accomplish much by thinking positively and strategically and then acting on what you plan. You really do need a mentor, though, to keep you on track. Seek qualified candidates now and by March you'll be on a plan you can stick to. You'll be celebrating major success milestones in April and August. Cancer and Leo adore you. Your lucky numbers are 3, 33, 31, 20 and 14.

BLONDIE



SALLY FORTH



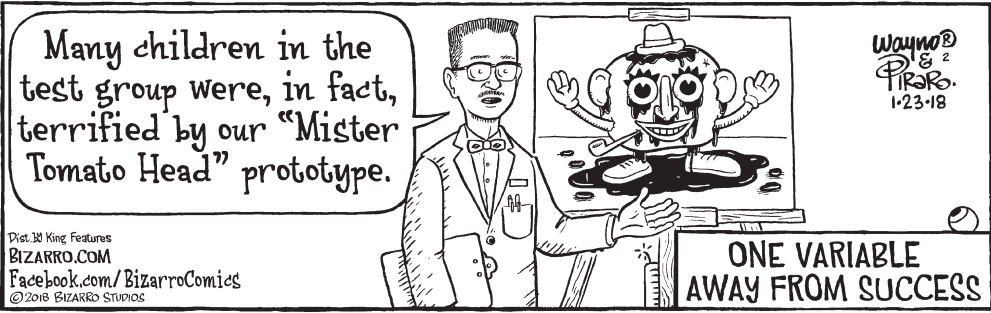
B.C.



DILBERT



BIZARRO



NON SEQUITUR



WIZARD OF ID



ROSE IS ROSE

