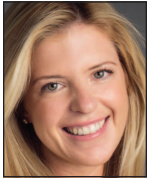


Missing that kid connection

Dear Annie: I'm 64. I have known "Ashley" for seven years. She is a mother of two young boys, ages 7 and 5. In her early mommy years, she needed a lot of help. She would call me in the early mornings and ask whether I could care for the kids so she could go to work. I would make the long drive after throwing water on my face.

DEAR ANNIE



Annie Lane
Creators
Syndicate Inc.

Ashley's boys call me Gramma. It's a heavenly title. Being able to enjoy these kids has truly filled a void in my life. I did not get to enjoy my own grandchildren because of a tragic divorce, losing my girls to parental abduction.

But Ashley has never been very mindful of my needs. I have had several surgeries. She would always say she would fix food and bring it by, but she never did. I'm low-income, but despite that, last Christmas I spent over my budget on the kids. I got them nice gifts and was excited to see them. It was February before I got to see them.

The boys are now both in school. Ashley is meeting lots of

other moms with kids the same ages, and I hear less and less from her. I did get the courage to ask whether I'd done something to make her angry. She assured me that I'm "family" and that she's just busy. Then I didn't hear from her.

I feel like an idiot for allowing myself to love those boys as much as I do. The hardest thing of all is that I truly thought Ashley cared. The little signs were there that I was being used, but I love the kids so much that I ignored them.

I suppose I should just be grateful for the time I did get to be a grandmother. It was wonderful! But oh, I do miss those kids. I sure wish there were a magic switch to just shut my heart off. — *The Friend Who Wasn't*

Dear Friend Who Wasn't: The dangerous thing about voids is the lengths to which you'll go to fill them — even at the expense of your own well-being, even if it means being used. And yes, maybe Ashley used you, but I don't think she did so consciously. Most young par-

ents would have a tough time resisting free baby sitting. In any case, fixating on what she did wrong gets you nowhere now.

Instead, turn your focus inward. That's where you'll find true spiritual fulfillment — which is much different from filling a void. Consider reading some books on codependency ("Codependent No More," by Melody Beattie, is one of the most famous, and "Boundaries," by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, is another) and/or attending counseling.

Take up some more activities on your own, whether it be cycling, kayaking, meditation, painting by number — anything that helps you appreciate the peace in solitude. And consider volunteering somewhere you could interact with many different children (e.g., being a docent at a children's museum), because it sounds as though children love you.

Once you've accepted that you are enough and that you don't need any external person or thing to be complete, you will come to view your big heart as a gift, not a liability.

TOMORROW'S HOROSCOPE

By Holiday Mathis, Creators Syndicate Inc.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). A little comedy will give a nice hum to an otherwise run-of-the-mill scenario. Your wry humor lands perfectly with the company you'll keep, and you could attract an admirer at that.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Everyone wants a piece of the pie today, and you'll take it one step further, preferring to call the flavor, too. You guessed it: You're going to have to do the baking now ... more work, and more satisfaction.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Feeling special in the eyes of others is important to everyone. It's wonderful to be adored and loved. While praise from others is a highlight today, real and lasting validation comes from within.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). If life is, as the song suggests, a highway, then today represents that stretch of road dominated by a rumbling hunger. Look for signs that will tell you where you might drive up and order what you need to feed your soul.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). The same outcome could be considered a victory or a loss, depending on the larger surrounding context and the expectations of those involved. Success may be a matter of opinion.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Disorder threatens to make work inefficient, though it will tend to make life more interesting. It's a trade-off you might consider before you clean, clear and organize it all.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Fresh, rested, energized, happy minds make the best decisions. It's why some people are a different person two hours into their day than they are 14 hours into it. It's also why nothing great happens past 2 a.m.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Listen to your trusted people. They see you more clearly than you'll see yourself. There also may be excellent information from the unvetted general public.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Business is not the only area of life ruled by the laws of supply and demand. Certain social roles are in high demand. People in those roles who feel underappreciated can easily find a different and better placement.

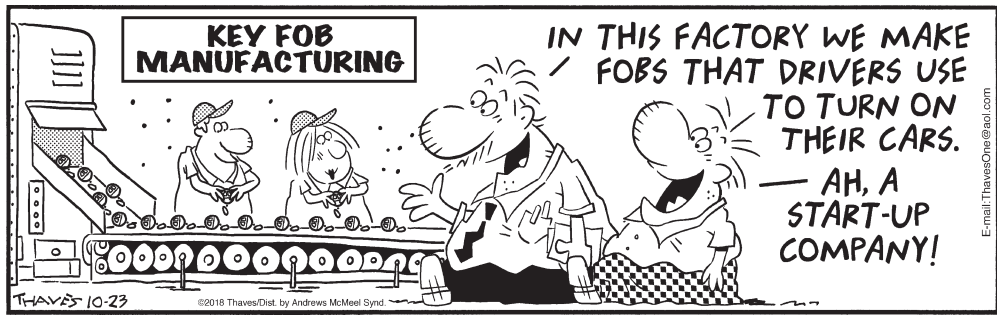
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You can't control what people think about you while it's happening, so don't worry about it. The time to influence people's impression of you is before you ever meet them. How you prepare will be everything.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). There are those who work very hard to make it look easy, and then there are those who make it look easy because it is actually easy to them. The first category appreciates compliments; the second doesn't.

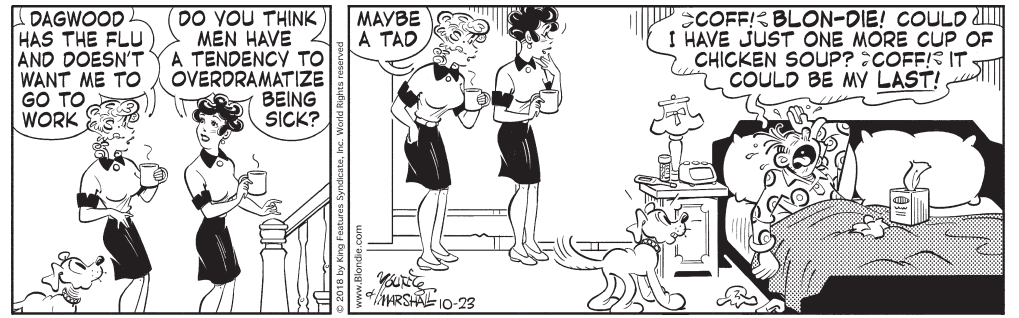
PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). As you concentrate on executing improvements that can be quantified (such as number of books read, number of calories consumed, number of people reached out to ...), unquantifiable improvements will take hold.

TOMORROW'S BIRTHDAY (Oct. 24). This solar return sees you more ambitious, and with good cause. You can definitely leverage what you have to create a better life. More highlights: a lucky guess that rains good fortune, a twisty, speedy, exhilarating professional stretch and companionship that is a delight and a comfort to you along the way. Aquarius and Pisces adore you. Your lucky numbers are: 6, 49, 33, 20 and 7.

FRANK AND ERNEST



BLONDIE



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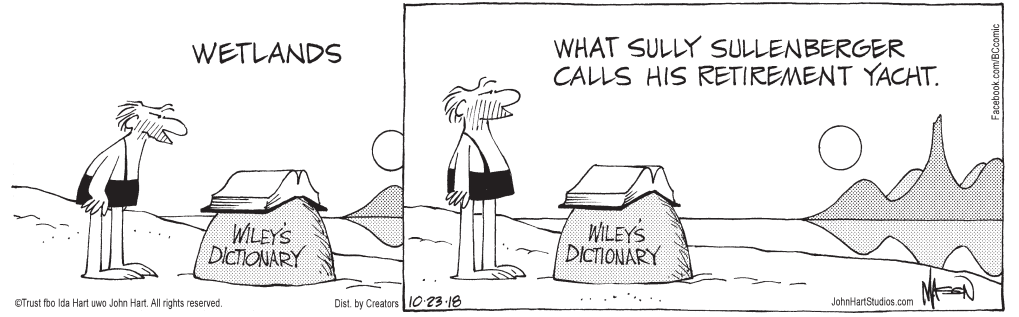
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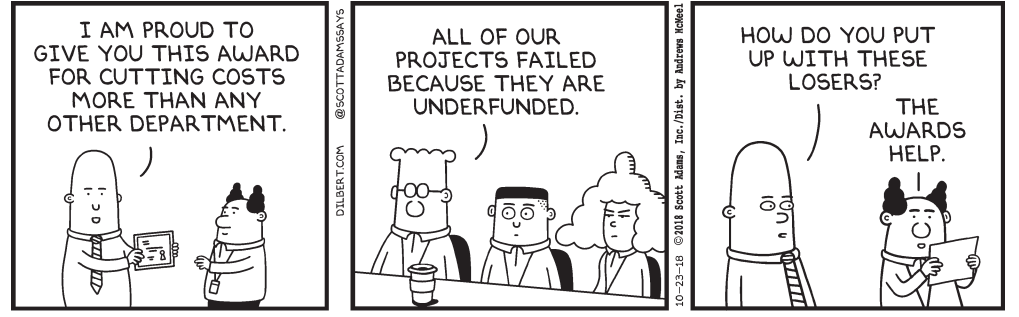
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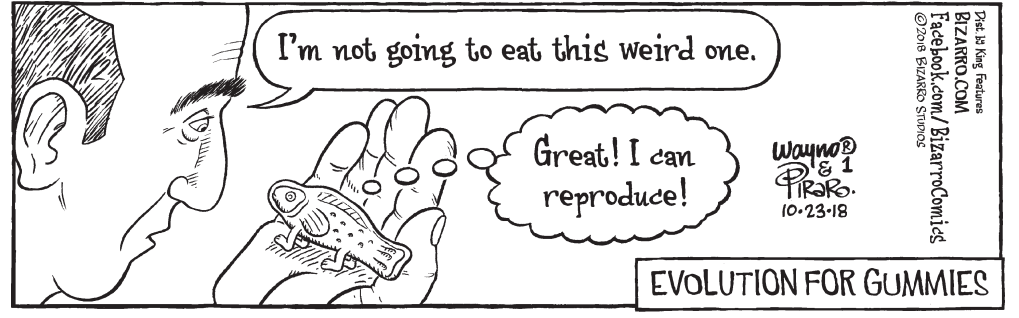
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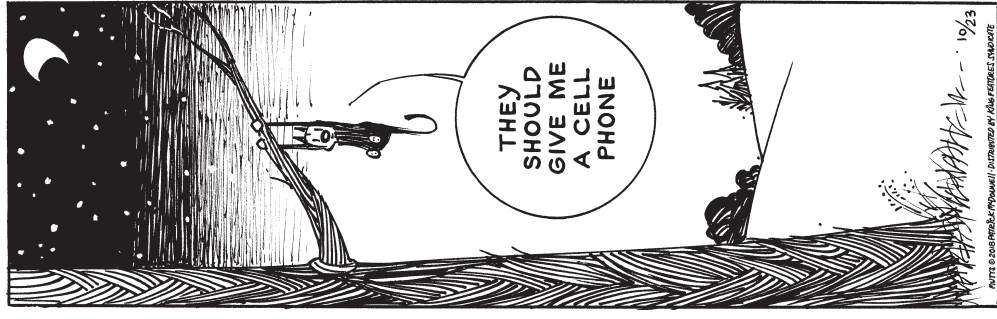
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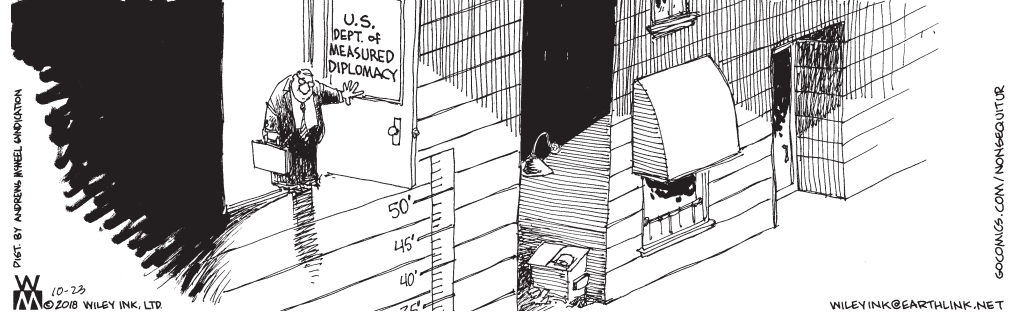
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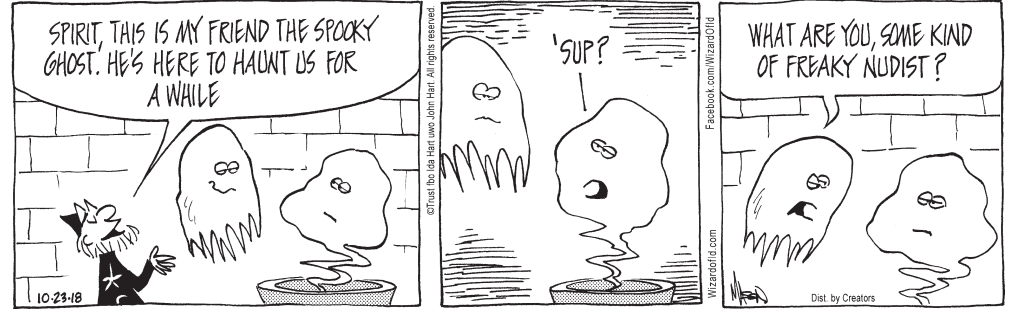
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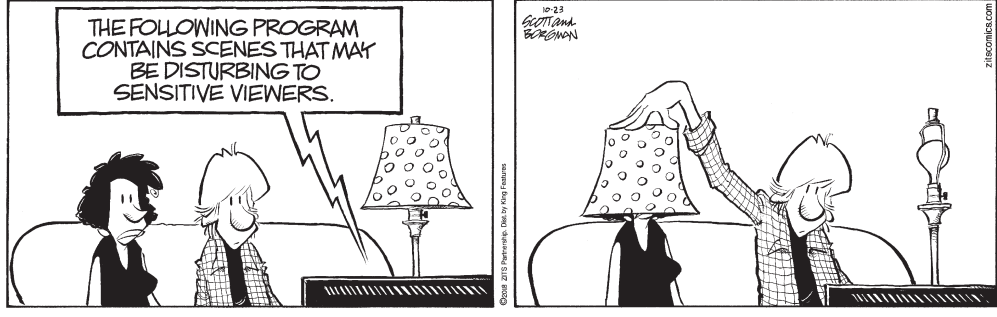
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