

Best friend feels uneasy as wedding bells approach



DEAR ABBY
ADVICE

something heartfelt since she's my close friend. I get anxious just thinking about it. Please give me some advice. — **RELUCTANT FRIEND IN INDIANA**

DEAR RELUCTANT FRIEND: When you write your speech, start by saying how long you and Sophie have been friends and how close the two of you are. Share a couple of anecdotes about what a caring, loyal, fun friend Sophie is, and state how lucky "Brian" is to be marrying her. Then toast the happy couple, wish them a lifetime of happiness together (even if you feel it won't turn out that way) and "drop the mic." You do not have to sing Brian's praises if you feel he doesn't

deserve it. That privilege should belong to the best man.

DEAR ABBY: My wife and I have friends — a married couple — we socialize with every few weeks. "Charles" is kind-hearted, pleasant and enjoyable, always with a good balance between speaking and listening during conversations. His wife, "Claire," on the other hand, isn't interested in hearing about our lives.

When we try to initiate a conversation, Claire cuts us off and switches the subject to a non-related, self-centered topic. She also interrupts Charles while he's talking. She goes on and on describing at length the minutiae of her activities and, worse, the

lives of her friends (who we don't know or have any interest in). We no longer enjoy her company, but we hate to lose the connection with Charles. Any suggestions?

— **BORED IN MISSOURI**

DEAR BORED: It may be time for you and Charles to see each other without wives in tow — for lunch or a sporting event. That way you will be off the hook having to tolerate Claire, and your wife won't have to put up with her because she can socialize with friends whose company she enjoys. I don't have a crystal ball, but I have a strong hunch you and your wife won't be the first to do this.

DEAR ABBY: I met a very

nice guy while I was at a bar. Because I was slightly drunk, he drove me home. We exchanged numbers and, since then, we have been out once. I'm pretty sure we will be going out again. The problem is I have no idea what his name is! We didn't exchange social media contacts. I feel awkward asking his name now. Any suggestions? — **UNKNOWN IN THE WEST**

DEAR UNKNOWN: Yes. The next time he gets in touch, ask him for the correct spelling of his first and last names "to enter into your contact list." It may manage to get you off the hook without embarrassing yourself, unless his name is John Smith.

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Alaska auction to feature huge opal stashed away for years

The Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska — Nick Cline gets calls about all kinds of items people want to sell through the Anchorage auction house where he works. But he was caught off-guard by a call he got last fall from a man saying he had "one of the largest opals in the world."

"I was extremely skeptical but extremely excited," said Cline, a partner and appraisal specialist with Alaska Premier Auctions & Appraisals.

According to the auction house, the opal, dubbed the "Americus Australis," weighs more than 11,800 carats and is one of the largest gem-quality opals in existence. It also has a long history.

Most recently, it was kept in a linen closet in a home in Big Lake, north of Anchorage, by Fred von Brandt, who mines for gold in Alaska and whose family has deep roots in the gem and rock business.

The opal is larger than a brick and is broken into two

pieces, which von Brandt said was a practice used decades ago to prove gem quality.

Von Brandt said the stone has been in his family since the late 1950s, when his grandfather bought it from an Australian opal dealer named John Altmann.

Von Brandt said the opal for decades was in the care of his father, Guy von Brandt, who decided it had been "locked up long enough, that it's time to put it back out in the world and see what interest it can generate."

"He entrusted me to figure out which direction we wanted to go to part with the stone," von Brandt told The Associated Press.

The family, with roots in California, exhibited the stone at gem shows for years, until the early 1980s, he said. His father then branched out into furniture and displayed it at his shop. Guy von Brandt eventually moved to Oregon and kept the stone "kind of tucked away" for many years, von Brandt said.



Mark Thiessen/The Associated Press

Dan Newman, left, the founder of Alaska Premier Auctions and Appraisals, and Nick Cline, a business partner, pose Friday, Feb. 18, 2022, in Anchorage, Alaska, with the "Americus Australis," thought to be one of the largest gem-quality opals in existence. The gem was offered at auction Sunday, Feb. 20, 2022, with an opening bid set at \$125,000.

Von Brandt said he brought it with him to Alaska over a year ago as he weighed the best approach to a possible sale. He said he went with Alaska Premier Auctions & Appraisals because he thought it would get more attention from the newer company than a larger auction house. The sale was

held Sunday, Feb. 20.

Cline said the family has documentation surrounding the provenance of the opal. As part of his research, he contacted Fiona Altmann, granddaughter of John Altmann and general manager of Altmann + Cherny in Sydney, Australia.

Altmann said her grand-

father, in his business dealings, made regular trips to Europe and the U.S.

Altmann said when Cline emailed her, she was skeptical; the name of the stone, in particular, threw her. But she said she started digging and discovered "something with my grandfather's handwriting with the picture of the opal with the word 'Americus Australis.'"

"I with 100% certainty know that their provenance information is 100% accurate" because it lines up with information she has, she said.

The auction house said the stone was discovered in the same field in Australia as the opal known as the "Olympic Australis," which weighs 17,000 carats and is on permanent display in Altmann's shop. The Olympic had been among the stones that John Altmann and partner Rudi Cherny acquired in 1956, according to Altmann's company.

The auction company is seeking minimum bids of

\$125,000 during Sunday's auction. Cline said it's a "calculated risk," with the company going with what it sees as a conservative approach in hopes of garnering the most attention. It has targeted a sales price of \$250,000 to \$350,000, Cline said.

The sale includes a smaller piece of the opal that von Brandt said his father cut off to be worn or displayed.

A spokesperson for the Gemological Institute of America said they could not comment on the opal as they had not seen it. The AP reached out to others who did not respond or were unfamiliar with the stone.

Altmann and von Brandt said they would love to see the opal end up in a museum. Von Brandt said he thinks the auction will be "both exciting and difficult, more for my dad than myself."

His father was a child when the family acquired the stone, and he has a "deeper connection than even I do," he said.

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weather

TONIGHT Mainly clear and frigid	WED Partly sunny; very cold	THU Clouds and sun; very cold	FRI Sunshine; turning colder	SAT Mostly cloudy and chilly
Baker City 3 Comfort Index™ 0	21 3 0	26 1 0	29 4 1	34 11 0
La Grande 4 Comfort Index™ 0	23 9 0	30 4 0	35 8 1	39 20 0
Enterprise -6 Comfort Index™ 0	19 5 0	23 0 0	28 0 1	34 17 1

Comfort Index takes into account how the weather will feel based on a combination of factors. A rating of 10 feels very comfortable while a rating of 0 feels very uncomfortable.

ALMANAC

TEMPERATURES	Baker City	La Grande	Elgin
High Sunday	39°	43°	44°
Low Sunday	22°	28°	30°
PRECIPITATION (inches)			
Sunday	Trace	0.09	0.24
Month to date	Trace	0.50	1.10
Normal month to date	0.42	0.87	1.69
Year to date	0.38	1.77	5.03
Normal year to date	1.12	2.54	4.96

SUNDAY EXTREMES

NATION (for the 48 contiguous states)	HIGH: 85°	Naples, Fla.
LOW: -14°	Antero Reservoir, Colo.	
WETTEST: 1.99"	Stampede Pass, Wash.	
OREGON	HIGH: 55°	The Dalles
LOW: 23°	Crater Lake	
WETTEST: 0.69"	Meacham	

AGRICULTURAL INFO.

HAY INFORMATION WEDNESDAY	
Lowest relative humidity	40%
Afternoon wind	NNW at 6 to 12 mph
Hours of sunshine	0.9
Evapotranspiration	0.03

RESERVOIR STORAGE (through midnight Monday)

Phillips Reservoir	3% of capacity
Unity Reservoir	32% of capacity
Owyhee Reservoir	22% of capacity
McKay Reservoir	41% of capacity
Wallowa Lake	25% of capacity
Thief Valley Reservoir	48% of capacity

STREAM FLOWS (through midnight Sunday)

Grande Ronde at Troy	1970 cfs
Thief Valley Reservoir near North Powder	1 cfs
Burnt River near Unity	7 cfs
Umatilla River near Gibbon	231 cfs
Minam River at Minam	150 cfs
Powder River near Richland	42 cfs

WEATHER HISTORY

On Feb. 22, 1980, Toledo, Ohio, was shrouded in fog for the seventh consecutive day. Fog is common in many parts of the country when winter snow melts.

SUN & MOON

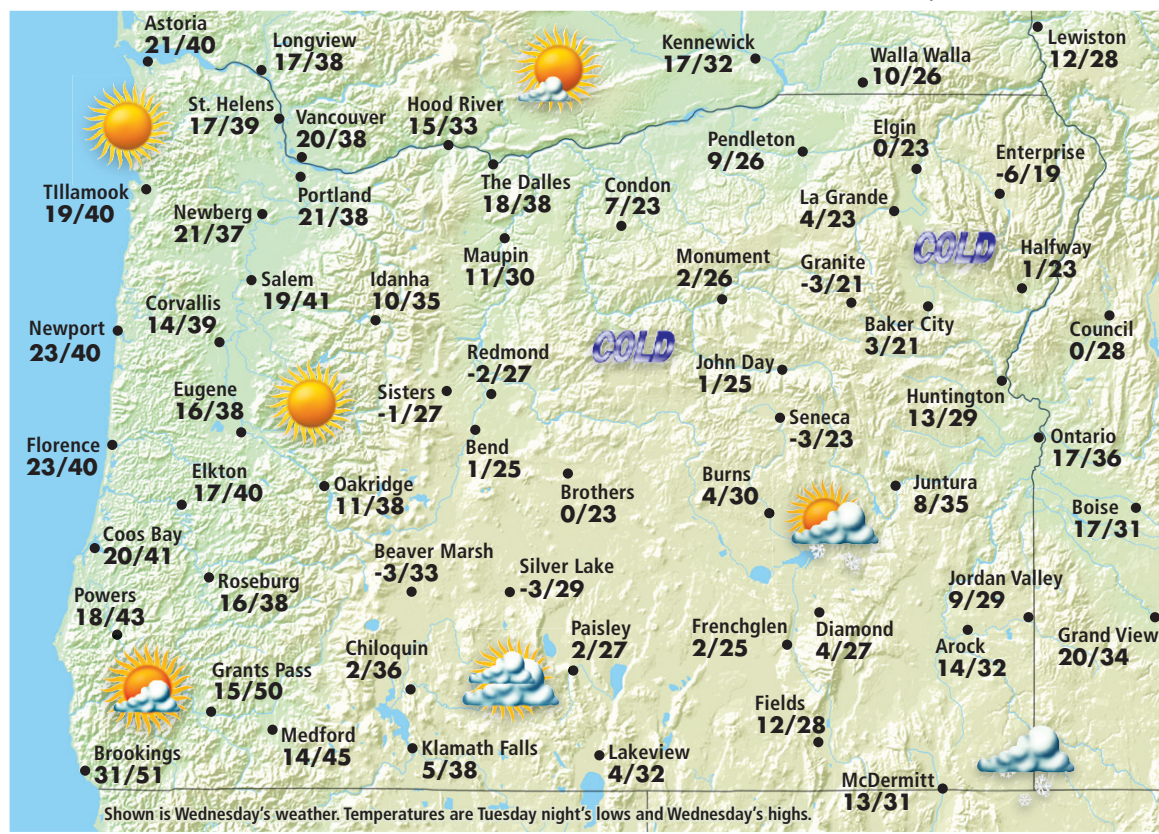
TUE.	WED.
Sunrise 6:43 a.m.	6:41 a.m.
Sunset 5:30 p.m.	5:31 p.m.
Moonrise none	12:45 a.m.
Moonset 9:36 a.m.	10:07 a.m.

MOON PHASES



AROUND OREGON AND THE REGION

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REGIONAL CITIES

City	WED. HI/Lo/W	THU. HI/Lo/W	City	WED. HI/Lo/W	THU. HI/Lo/W
Astoria	40/29/pc	45/30/pc	Lewiston	28/19/pc	32/16/c
Bend	25/6/s	38/17/c	Longview	38/23/s	39/26/pc
Boise	31/17/s	36/14/pc	Meacham	23/10/pc	29/2/pc
Brookings	51/32/s	54/35/c	Medford	45/16/pc	48/21/s
Burns	30/9/pc	36/9/s	Newport	40/30/pc	44/33/c
Coos Bay	41/22/s	46/28/c	Olympia	40/23/s	42/24/pc
Corvallis	39/19/s	44/24/c	Ontario	36/16/s	40/16/pc
Council	28/4/pc	26/-1/c	Pasco	34/20/pc	37/15/s
Elgin	23/8/pc	30/0/sn	Pendleton	27/4/s	39/15/pc
Eugene	38/20/s	43/25/c	Portland	38/25/s	42/28/pc
Hermiston	31/21/s	39/16/s	Powers	43/21/s	49/28/pc
Hood River	33/21/pc	44/21/pc	Redmond	27/4/s	39/15/pc
Imnaha	25/14/pc	29/5/sn	Roseburg	38/21/pc	45/26/pc
John Day	25/13/c	31/7/pc	Salem	41/22/s	46/24/c
Joseph	19/5/pc	21/1/sn	Spokane	24/14/pc	29/13/pc
Kennecook	32/22/pc	38/14/s	The Dalles	38/23/pc	45/21/s
Klamath Falls	38/8/s	45/12/s	Ukiah	19/7/s	27/2/pc
Lakeview	32/8/s	39/12/s	Walla Walla	26/18/pc	31/15/pc

Weather(W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice

RECREATION FORECAST WEDNESDAY

ANTHONY LAKES Bitterly cold	9 -2	COLD	PHILLIPS LAKE Sunshine and cold	24 5	
MT. EMILY REC. Bitterly cold	13 8	COLD	BROWNLEE RES. Very cold	29 9	COLD
EAGLE CAP WILD. Bitterly cold	10 -6	COLD	EMIGRANT ST. PARK Very cold	14 1	COLD
WALLOWA LAKE Frigid	19 5	COLD	MCKAY RESERVOIR Very cold	22 15	COLD
THIEF VALLEY RES. Very cold	21 3	COLD	RED BRIDGE ST. PARK Quite cold	23 9	COLD

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