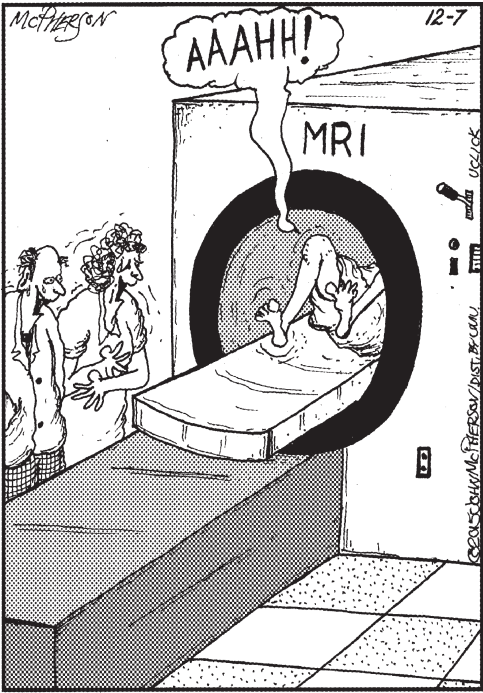


CLOSE TO HOME by John McPherson



"I tell ya, work has gotten to be so much more fun since we hung that rubber spider in there."

Holiday greeting is acceptable to return

Dear Abby: Every year around the holidays, well-intentioned strangers wish me and my family "Merry Christmas!" Even though we are Jewish, I have always regarded it to be a kind gesture to spread good cheer. I smile and return the greeting.

My children have asked me why I don't tell people we're Jewish and that we don't celebrate Christmas. I don't feel I need to educate strangers when they're just trying to be friendly, but my kids don't agree. We've had several discussions about being friendly and polite, but still they ask if being Jewish is something to keep secret or be embarrassed about.

I don't want to rain on anyone's parade, but I do want to give my kids the message that we are proud of who we are. How do you recommend I handle this situation, because it happens a lot? — *Jill in Santa Rosa, Calif.*

Dear Jill: Explain to your children that you return the greeting to be polite, not

because you feel being Jewish is anything to be ashamed of. The strangers who do this are saying something nice, and you are returning the greeting.

However, the response to people to whom you are closer and with whom there will be a deeper relationship should be different. To them, your children should explain that they are Jewish and that you celebrate Hanukkah rather than Christmas.

When you're with them, if they feel the need to assert their Jewish identity, they should go right ahead and do it.

Dear Abby: I have been with my boyfriend for 16 years. Last year I found out he was married before I met him and still is married to her. He never told me he was married when I met him — or at all. If he had, we wouldn't be together.

His wife got ahold of me on Facebook because she was looking for him. I was in disbelief.

We almost got married in 2007, which would have been bigamy. I have stayed with him for the sake of our kids, but I'm miserable.

I recently reconnected with a male friend

from high school. We have been talking, but not romantically.

He knows my situation. The problem is, he said that he had a crush on me back in school and still does. I have feelings for him, too — more than just friendship. What do I do? — *Emotionally Lost in Maryland*

Dear Lost: I can only imagine the extent to which your trust has been shaken. What you need to do right now is recognize how vulnerable you are feeling. What you shouldn't do is rebound from one relationship into another.

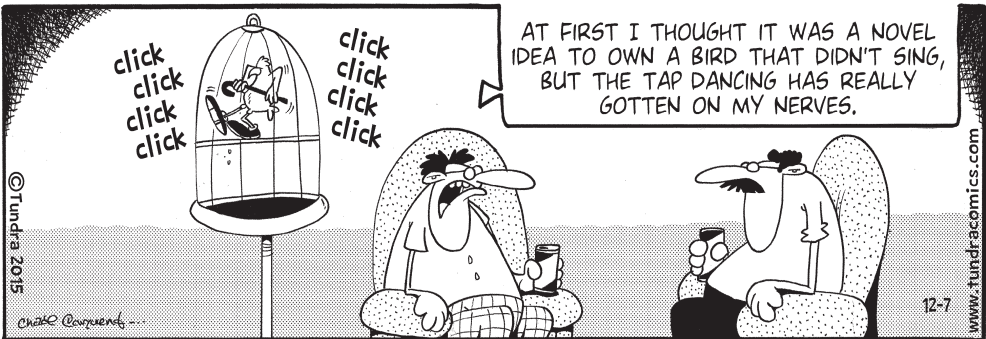
Because you are no longer happy with your boyfriend, consult an attorney to ensure your children's father lives up to his financial obligations to them.

If you don't have a job, start looking for one to supplement the child support income.

Once you have established economic independence, you will be in a better position to judge whether or not your old high school friend is your knight in shining armor.

Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

TUNDRA by Chad Carpenter



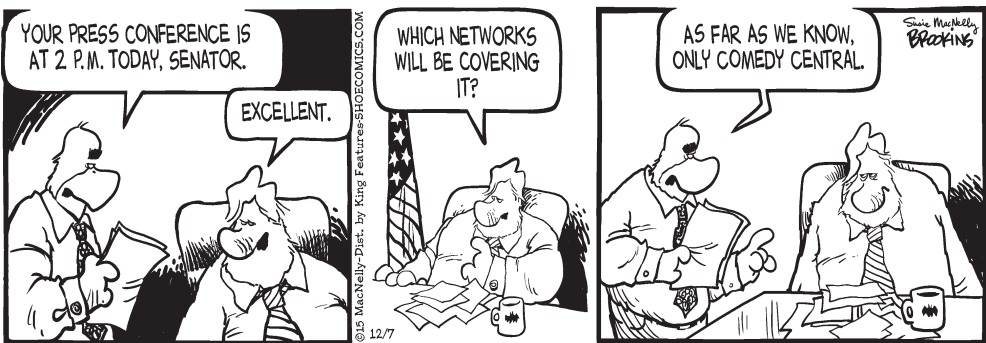
PEARLS BEFORE SWINE by Stephan Pastis



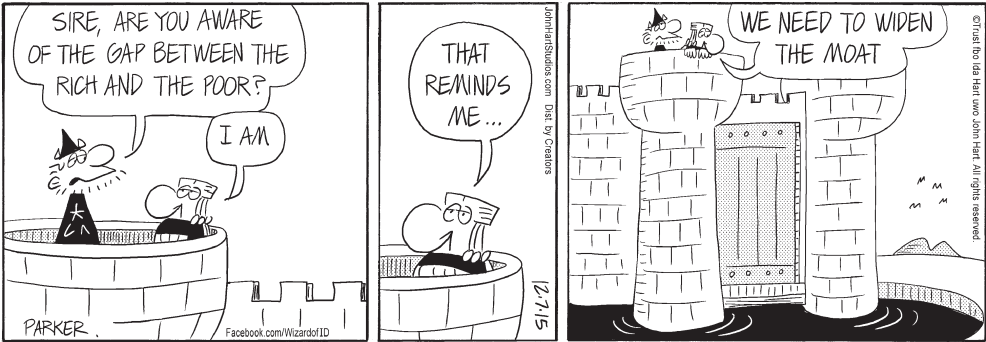
GARFIELD by Jim Davis



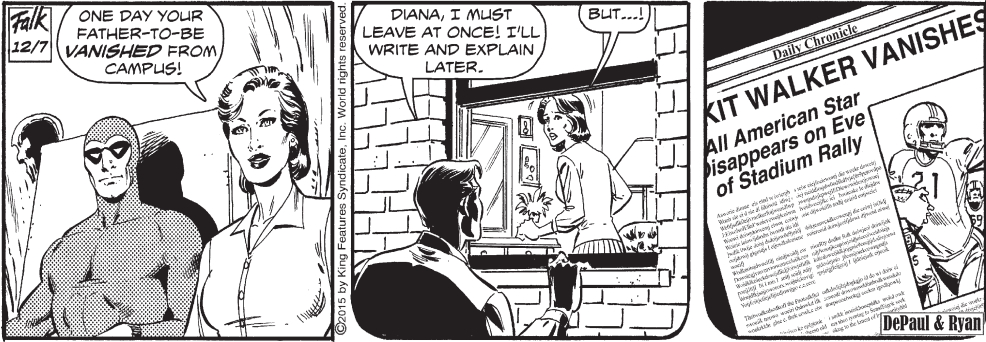
JEFF MACNELLY'S SHOE by Chris Cassatt and Gary Brookins



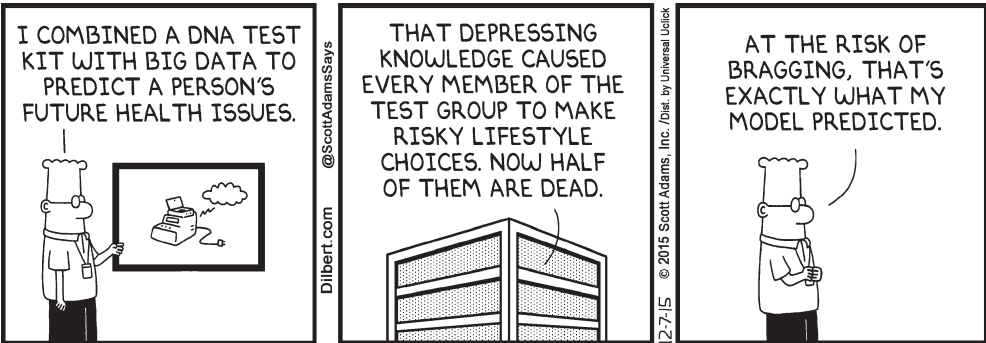
WIZARD OF ID by Brant Parker



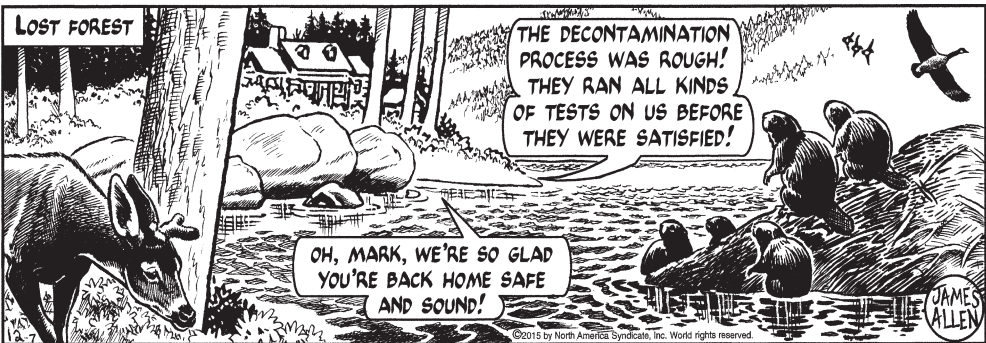
THE PHANTOM by Lee Falk



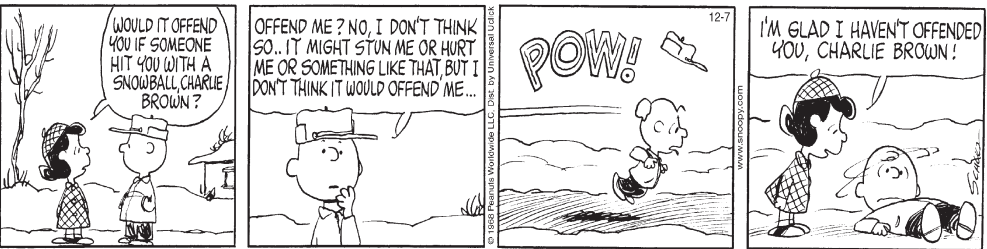
DILBERT by Scott Adams



MARK TRAIL by James Allen



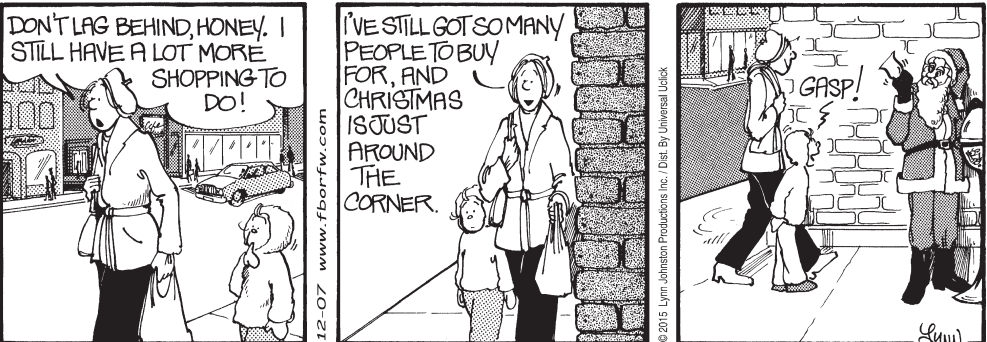
PEANUTS by Charles Schulz



PICKLES by Brian Crane



FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE by Lynn Johnston



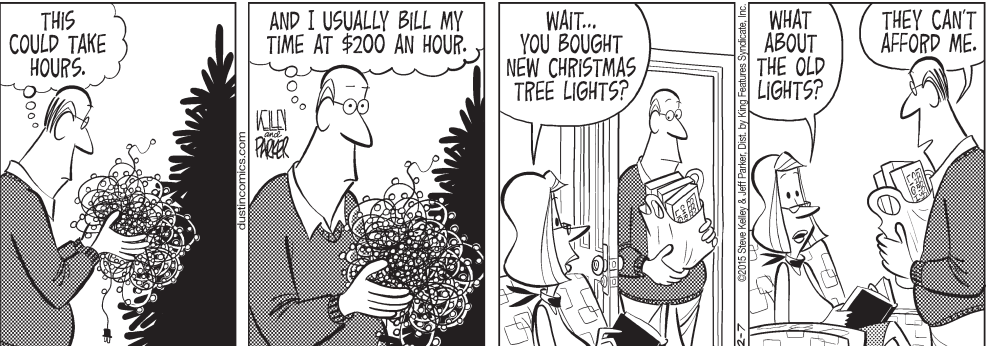
BABY BLUES by Jerry Scott & Rick Kirkman



ZITS by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



DUSTIN by Steve Kelley and Jeff Parker



Daily Horoscope

ARIES (March 21-April 19). There's a way to get help and still do it yourself. The best position for you will be one that utilizes the specialty talents of others while getting final say on what you're offering to the world.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). If you wouldn't buy it, you don't want to sell it. It's called integrity, and while it doesn't always work in line with your finances, it works in line with your character.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). The short answer is that there is no short answer. The kind of complexities involved in today's problem must be gone through word-by-word, one example at a time.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). It takes two to tango, but it only takes one to freestyle. That's where you're at today, dancing freely and loving the motion of it. For now, you don't have to worry about what anyone else thinks.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). It is human nature to be impressed by those who do what you only wish you could do. Time and practice will change the dynamic. You will eventually become like your idols and others will then idolize you.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Even when it seems like general interest in your mission is on the decline, continue the pursuit. Later they'll admire your passion — that is, if you keep going.

Think of yourself as a lone crusader chasing a rare treasure.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). If you don't like what you're getting, change your offering and see what happens. Different actions will yield different results. Your experimental, playful mood will open possibilities.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Today, part of your mind is perplexed; the other part is a powerful genius. Which part is which? A good friend will help you sort this out. Here is the big question: Who are your good friends?

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You don't need to be validated. You already know what you can do. They need something. Will you give it? Do you realize that's what they are looking for?

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You hate when people tell you to smile, and yet you love smiling when it comes organically. Bottom line: You can't be willed into a mood, but by you or anyone else. But you can choose a mood!

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Marilyn Monroe suggested, "Imperfection is beauty." Easy for her to say, as her version of "imperfection" became the new "perfect." Although, consider that maybe your version of "imperfection" is the new "perfect," too.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). Storms are named after people. You've a lot going on inside that emotional body. If they don't name a storm after you tonight, consider yourself a big winner:



HOLIDAY MATHIS