

CLOSE TO HOME by John McPherson



"I'd like to report a lost dad, last seen in the underwear department, 48, bald, kind of goofy-looking, answers to the name 'Ed.'"

Parent seeks a way to avoid play dates

Dear Abby: I'm about to get custody of my daughter after four years, so I'm a little out of the parenting etiquette loop. A friend of mine has a daughter, "Autumn," who is an absolute terror and a bully. The girl has been rude to my daughter during the times she has visited.

I know I won't be able to avoid social functions because Autumn's family is always invited to a mutual friend's events. My daughter wants nothing to do with her, and I don't know how to easily avoid play dates. Please advise.

— Perplexed in the West



JEANNE PHILLIPS
DEAR ABBY

Dear Perplexed: Talk to Autumn's parents about her behavior, so it can be corrected. If you are worried about your daughter having to interact with the girl, suggest that she socialize with the other children at the event. If the girl acts out against your daughter, tell your child she is welcome to come and spend some time with you. While you can't completely insulate her from unpleasant peers, this may lessen the pain.

Dear Abby: I'm in high school, and I'm having some problems with my friend "Dave." I'm in every one of his classes, and he keeps coming to me and asking if I want to work with him.

I need to say no, but I don't know how. It would be nice to work with other friends, but how do I tell that to Dave? — Connecticut Sophomore

Dear Sophomore: Be frank with your friend. All you have to say is: "Dave, I like working with you — but I also want to work with other people. If we both work with some of the others, it will keep us sharper." And if he indicates that he's taking it as a personal rejection, tell him it isn't true — that you like him, but think it's not smart for either of you to limit yourselves. (It's the truth.)

Dear Abby: I could use some advice about family roles. Mine always seems to be the peacekeeper and mediator. Without going into too much detail, my family has some issues, and they usually volunteer me to fix the problem. It's extremely stressful, and I feel guilty when I don't succeed.

I am a travel nurse, and I accepted an assignment across the country to try to step back from it. Some of the drama follows me here, but it's nothing like when I was home. My guilt continues because I feel like my duty is to be with my family, especially my sister, who is emotionally co-dependent on me. Any advice to help divide the roles? — Overwhelmed in Phoenix

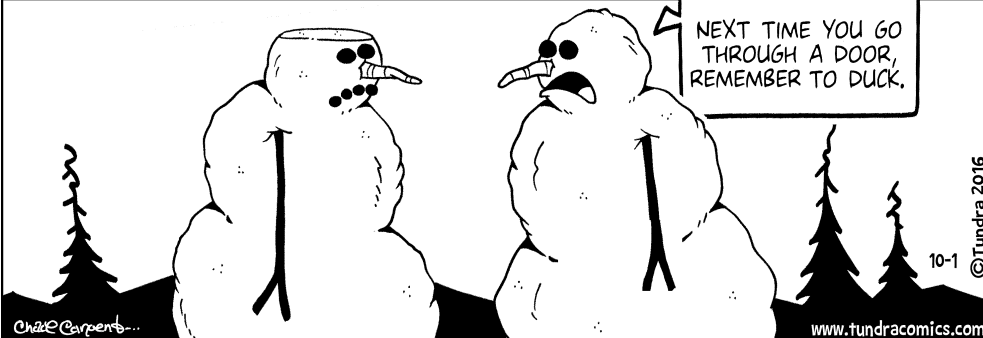
Dear Overwhelmed: Please stop feeling like you did something wrong in taking that assignment.

You made the right choice. By doing it, you have gifted your family with the opportunity to learn to deal with its issues without relying exclusively on you.

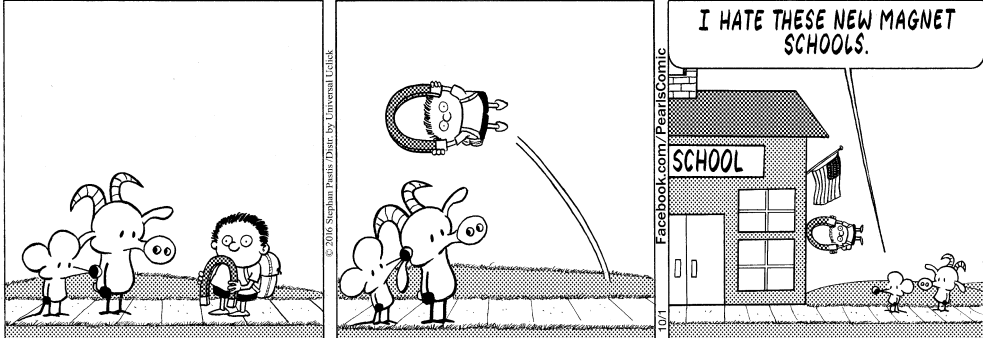
By now it should have dawned on YOU that you cannot fix your sister's co-dependency problem. Only she can do that, if she's willing to recognize that she has a problem and accept that a licensed psychotherapist — and not her sister — can provide her with the tools to overcome it.

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

TUNDRA by Chad Carpenter



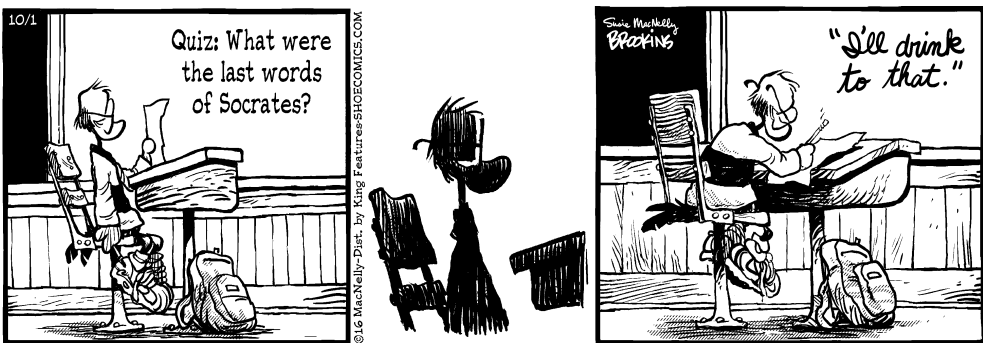
PEARLS BEFORE SWINE by Stephan Pastis



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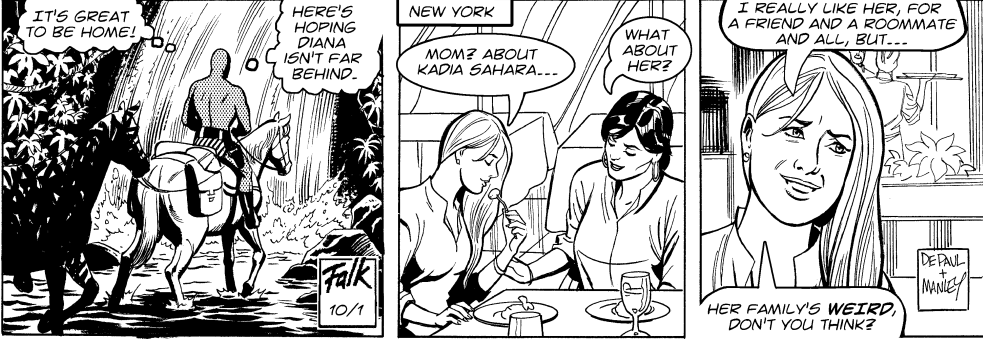
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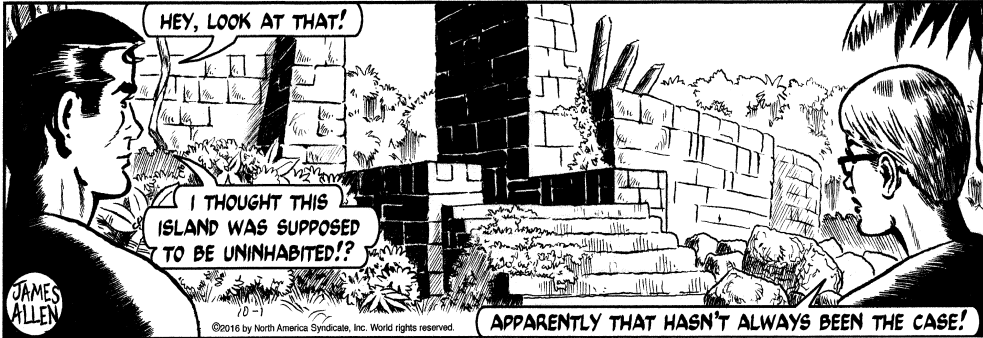
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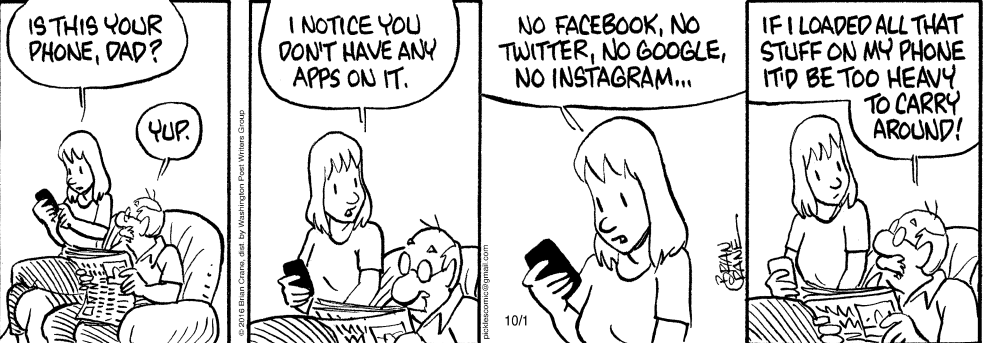
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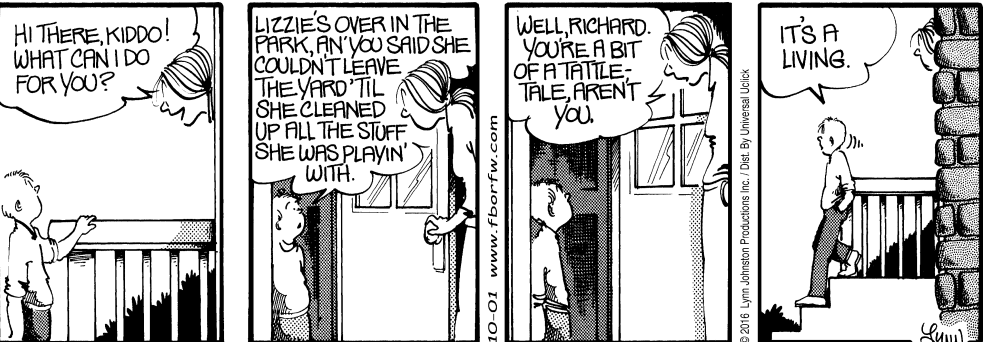
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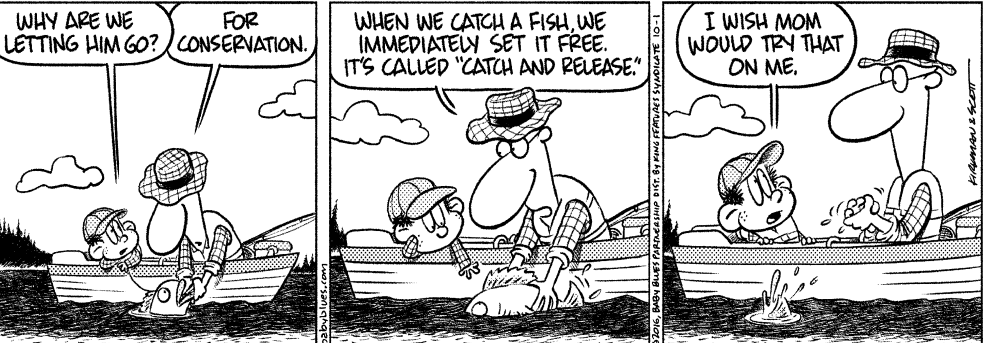
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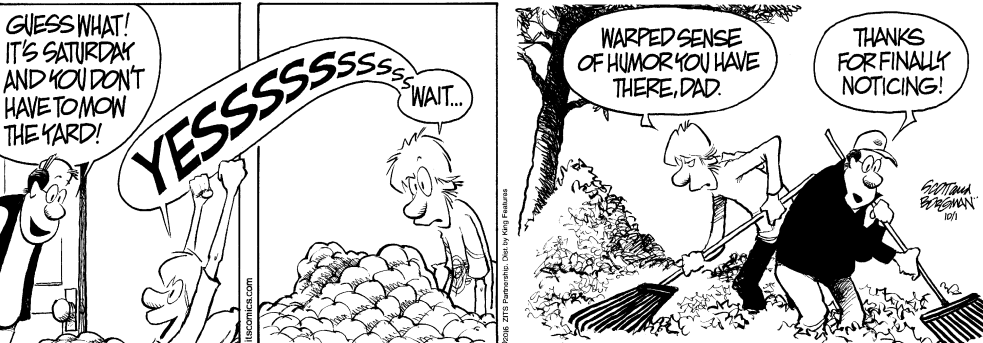
FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE by Lynn Johnston



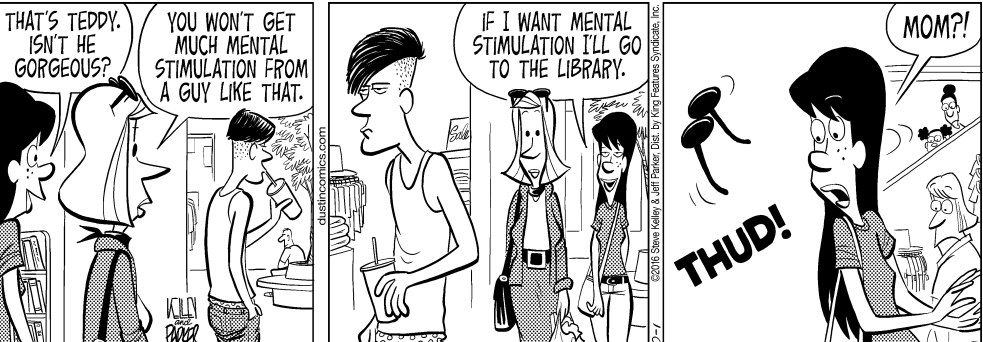
BABY BLUES by Jerry Scott & Rick Kirkman



ZITS by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



DUSTIN by Steve Kelley and Jeff Parker



Daily Horoscope

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Those who think that clothing doesn't matter much will think again. What you wear when you go out will play a key role in how you feel and who you are being in the situation.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Does it seem like other people's opinions are getting heard more readily than yours? Remedy this. Speak up. Bring a bullhorn if you have to; it will benefit all.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). You could love something just because someone else loves it, and that will turn out to be as good a reason as any. Getting wrapped up in the spirit of things will be wonderful.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). There's something complicated in your personal life that's about to get much less so. All you have to do is see the truth and notice it. You don't have to do anything about about it.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). The love of your life may be a person, or it may be a fascination. Either way, this great love will hold the lion's share of your attention this weekend. Partnering with a Libra in some way will be lucky.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). You don't like the feeling that someone is checking your every move. However, right now there's something nice about knowing that there are those who are aware of you and "have your back."

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Maybe you don't care if your efforts get noticed or not; you're acting purely to refine your character and expand your heart as you go above and beyond what is being asked of you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). This is a lucky day to make reservations, plan ahead, buy tickets and more. You'll land the best seats, the center of the meat, the prime spot for socializing with just the people who can help you the most.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Babies crawl before they walk: It's safer this way. From the hands and knees they don't have as far to fall. Do your learning in the order that strengthens and builds your skills organically.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). If the clothes don't fit or the sheets no longer stay on the bed, get rid of them. But if it's just a broken relationship — well, it's quite possible that can be mended with only a few words. And you're in just the mood to try it, too.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). As for the weeds in the garden of your social life, these pesky creatures seem intent on causing disorder among your well-tended base. Either chalk it up to "nature" or uproot that which offends.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). There may be a surprise limitation thrown your way, but this will actually prove to be an advantage. If you're stuck between a rock and a hard place, there's nowhere to go but up.