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HUMOR

With all due respect, yer a Ding Dong

DAVE BARRY

It is time for another rendition of "Ask Mister Language Person," the only grammar column approved for internal use by the Food and Drug Administration; the grammar column that puts the "dip" in "diphthong," the "vern" in "vernacular," and the "dang" in "dangling participle."

Today we shall commence right at the outset by starting with our first question, which concerns vocabulary:

Q. What does "decimate" mean?

A. This often-misunderstood word is an anterior cruciate predicate that should be used in conjugal phrases, as follows:

"Noreen was totally decimated when she found Vern wearing her good pantyhose."

Q. *What is the difference between an "effort" and a "concerted effort?"*

A. An effort is when an individual gives between zero and 110 percent; anything above that is a concerted effort, and generally should result in knee damage.

Q. *What is the correct usage of the phrase "With all due respect?"*

A. It is correctly used to "soften the blow" when you wish to criticize someone in a diplomatic and nonjudgmental manner, as in: "With all due respect, you are much worse than Hitler," or "No disrespect intended, but you have the intelligence of a macaroon."

Q. What are "metrosexuals"?



CASSATT & BROOKINS

A. They are individuals who have sex (also known as "bling bling") on subways.

Q. I often am confused about the difference between the words "accept" and "except." Is there any way to tell them apart?

A. Not at this time.

Q. *I am a real-estate developer building a residential subdivision on a former landfill, and I can't decide which name would be more prestigious: "The Oaks at Hampton Chase Manor," or "The Estates of the Falls of the Landings of Hunters Run."*

A. How recently was the property used as a landfill?

Q. *In some of the yards, you can still see refrigerators sticking out of the dirt.*

A. We would recommend "The Knolls at Cheshire Pointe Landings on the Greene."

Q. *What is the correct pronunciation of "epitome"? I say it's "epitome," but my friend Bill says it's "epitome."*

A. With all due respect, you are both morons. "Epitome," when pronounced correctly, rhymes with "penultimate," and is used as follows: "In my concerted opinion, Ding Dongs is the epitome of the Hostess snack line."

Q. What is the best true headline ever to appear in an actual newspaper?

A. In our opinion, that would be a headline from the Petersburg (Va.) Progressive-Index, over a story about a mishap during the 2001 Bike Week gathering of motorcyclists in Florida. The headline, which was sent to us by alert reader Mary Ellen Lloyd, says: "Skydiver lands on beer vendor at women's cole-slaw wrestling event."

Q. *Do you have any other true examples of excellent language use sent in by actual readers?*

A. Of course:

- An alert Missouri reader sent in a newsletter from Rocky Mountain National Park containing this tip for visitors: "Avoid the traffic by using one of the park's shuttle buses and view the elk rut with a park ranger."
- Nan Bell and Elisabeth Lindsay sent in an Associated Press article concerning efforts to identify the person whose leg washed ashore in Bodega Bay, Calif., containing this quote from an official of the coroner's office: "We were stumped, basically."

- Claudette Knieriem sent in a Manchester (N.H.) Union Leader classified ad for a child-care center that says: "FUN AT PLAY where it's creative, safe, wholesome and neutering."
- Larry and Suzanne Tingley sent in an article from the Watertown (N.Y.) Daily Times stating that the Lewis County Board of Legislators had authorized the creation of a petty cash fund "for the weekly purchase of dry ice, used for incest control."
- Dolores Evans sent in an article from Harrisburg (Pa.) Patriot News headlined: "Smoking organ causes stir at nursing home."
- Roy Winter sent in a New Orleans Times-Picayune article concerning a breakout at an animal-research facility, headlined: "Tulane center monkeys escape; half are captured in time for dinner."
- Alert journalist David Davidson wrote in to point out that there is a collegiate women's basketball team that is officially known as "The Lady Golden Bulls."

Q. What college do The Lady Golden Bulls play for?

A. That would be Johnson C. Smith University.

TODAY'S WRITING TIP FOR JOB-SEEKERS: When writing a résumé, be sure to use "power words" to describe your accomplishments and skills:

WRONG: "I supervised a team of 15 data-entry clerks."

RIGHT: "I can snap your spine like a toothpick."