

Inside

- 2 Richard's Poor Almanac
- 2 Style Invitational
- 3 Miss Manners
- 5 Bridge

Style

SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 2001

F
Advice
Humor
Personals

TONY KORNHEISER

The Commencement Redress

Because my sweet babboo is graduating from high school this week I thought I might be asked to deliver the commencement address.

I did it once before and I was a rousing success—especially when I offered congratulations to “the graduates of St. Michael’s,” and the school was actually named St. Matthew’s. Okay, I made a mistake. But as I told them, “There’s a lesson in this for all of us. The lesson is: This is what happens when you don’t pay your graduation speaker.”

It turns out I won’t be making graduation remarks this year. In a foolish moment, one they’ll regret during the fall fund drive for years to come, Maret School got some nobody to take my place. I don’t even know why I’m mentioning his name. Ted Kennedy.

Not that I’m bitter. But let me say I won’t be at all shocked if he steers clear of a real meaty topic like “Is Maret’s Mystery Burger made from mad cow?” (“Steers” clear, “meaty,” get it? God, I’m funny! Those people don’t know what they’re missing.), and he concentrates on something a little less controversial, like “Contour Plowing in the Next Century.”

Actually, a graduation address is a perfect place for that Kennedy fellow to show off his wide-ranging grasp of important issues that face us as a nation. With his decades of distinguished public service, he could really send these young people off with purpose, dedication and direction. But isn’t that overrated? I mean, really, who cares? My advice to the graduates would have been, “Who do I look like? Ted Kennedy? Hey, figure it out yourselves.”

I wasn’t going to make a speech, per se. But if I did, I’d have sprinkled it with a huge wad o’ cultured foreign phrases like “per se” and “up the ying-yang.” And I’d have thrown in some of them brilliant insights I’m famous for, such as, “I know graduation can be a frightening time. But remember, boys and girls, the word ‘commencement’ does not mean ending. Rather, it has its origin in an Old French word meaning ‘to

See KORNHEISER, F3, Col. 1

Noted With Historical Accuracy



BY ROBERT MORGAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The encounter on the Metro began with an innocent question, and ended with a question of innocence. **PAGE 2**

TELL ME ABOUT IT®

Advice for the Under-30 Crowd

By CAROLYN HAX
Washington Post Staff Writer

Carolyn:

I've been seeing a girl for several months now. She told me early on that she wasn't interested in me romantically, but we continued to see each other and have become increasingly close as friends. A few days ago I told her I was interested in her. When she

Shtick Man of the Sea

The life and many, many deaths of a cruise ship comedian



BY STEPHANIE DIANI FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Jim McDonald, who had dreams of Letterman and Leno, now does his bits in the sixth circle of Comedy Hell, the cruise ship circuit. What can he teach us about the gap between aspiration and attainment?

By STEVE FRIEDMAN
Special to The Washington Post

ABOARD THE CELEBRITY GALAXY,
somewhere in the Caribbean

THE BINGO GAME IS RUNNING LATE. That's bad news for the cruise ship comedian, who has grown accustomed to bad news. So he waits backstage. And he thinks. And he knows that slumping among the sunburned, bloated, hung-over, medicated, gaping and occasionally dozing vacationers he needs to make laugh tonight, there will be knots of resentful bingo losers. Some won't even speak English. Tough crowd. Here's something tougher: He considers himself a painstaking craftsman, someone who detests cheap gags, and his audience loves cruise ship toilet jokes.

He looks about 32, but is older. He's the youngest comedian working the cruise lines and would rather his age not be revealed. He tries not to think about growing old at sea.

Showtime. He walks to the front of the stage, looks upon the gapers.

"Nice to be here," he booms. "How are ya?"

A smattering of applause.

"You sound really good, yeah. Hey, before we get started, by applause, how many people in this crowd tonight have actually seen me on MTV?"

Three people clap. "You know, that is so funny, because you really look like an MTV kind of crowd."

Quiet, except for a few weak, watery chuckles.

"Hey, I'm really susceptible to motion sickness."

Lonely coughing.

"Last ship I did I tried one of those patches behind my ear. That didn't work. (Beat). I quit smoking, though."

More coughs. A laugh from the rear right corner echoes. He is still. Rows and rows of pale, over-stuffed toilet-joke-lovers do the thousand-yard stare, among them scores of glowering lumps silently cursing whatever malevolent Caribbean deity withheld from them G-57. He smiles, the almost-convincing-at-long-range rictus of a used-car sales-

man with a big family and huge mortgage. On the last night of a six-night cruise, inside the Galaxy theater, a woman in the fourth row dozes. Someone else coughs. He has spent too many years getting used to nights like these. The cruise ship comedian is dying.

Bad things happen to cruise ship comedians. They happen with regularity, and predictability. Jim McDonald, the cruise ship comedian, knows this. First-night-at-sea performances are trouble—because of the seasick and heavily medicated crowd. Last-night-at-sea shows mean too many people worrying about packing and catching the airport shuttle and how much to tip the stewards. Holidays are worse. "People who would get on a cruise ship to celebrate Christmas," he says, "are not the happiest people in the world."

It doesn't help that cruise ship passengers tend to

See COMIC, F4, Col. 1

The Comic Who Killed, Then Died

COMIC, From F1

go on cruises not because they yearn for uncomfortable truths, which a serious comic like McDonald can't resist telling. They go because they want the buffets, the umbrella drinks, the steel bands banging away when they walk down the gang-plank. They want a cruise ship comedian who tells nice, safe, predictable jokes. Cruise ship toilet jokes.

He has been heckled. He has listened to silence following a joke—a quiet so profound that when someone coughed, he could identify the cougher's sex and age (girl, 11). He has been booed. A Christmas cruise, his one and only.

"Norwegian Lines, '96, and I ate it, I ate it hard. But you know what? I told every joke well. I performed well. I had a job to do, and I did it. I hated them, and they hated me, but I did my job."

Of all the bad, sad things McDonald has seen and heard, though, the saddest and baddest is the chilling vision of the watery destiny that sometimes seems to beckon him, the grim fate that awaits any aging yunker who sails too far, too often.

"Usually a guy named Shecky," the cruise ship comedian says. "Been on the ships for years. He's a guy who's had his time and that time has passed him by, or he's a hack who never got where he wanted to. And most of these guys, they think, 'Just one more rung up and I'll hit the big time.' What they don't realize is the ladder was yanked out from under them about two decades ago."

A Real Card

When McDonald moved to Los Angeles, he got a day shift tending bar. Nights, he drove to Open Mike events. "Magnets for freaks," McDonald says. "People whose motto was, 'I got some stuff to workout onstage, so you guys are gonna listen.'"

One night, one of the freaks bragged that he had sold a joke to Leno. So McDonald wrote ten jokes a week, in addition to working on his own act and bartending. Some of the freaks told him not to be stupid. "Give it up," they said. "Work on your own material."

The seventh week, there's a phone message. Leno. He liked joke number 74. McDonald didn't think, "I'm rich!" He didn't think, "Leno loves me!" What he thought was, "I can do this." Since then he has opened for Ellen DeGeneres, Garry Shandling, David Spade. He has been to Leno's house, lunched with Jerry Seinfeld, appeared on more late-night cable shows than he cares to remember. He's been making a living as a comedian for 10 years, working the ships for six. He still wants to appear on "The Tonight Show"; to sell a screenplay, or an idea for a television sitcom; to act in movies. No, he wasn't where he wanted to be. Yes, some of his comedian friends had achieved more success. Sure, he was frustrated that he couldn't take chances with new material on the ships, worried that he might be drifting, figuratively and literally.

"But what are you going to do?" he said the first time I met him, before he'd agreed to serve as tour guide through that shadowy and perilous territory dividing hope and reality. "You get a call and they say, 'Hey, can you come out to the Caribbean for a few weeks?' You're sitting in your New York walk-up, no heat. What are you gonna say, 'Uh, no, I really can't—I'm busy eating some Top Ramen right now?'"

Besides, club gigs, if and when he could get them, paid \$600 for five nights of work, while at sea he made \$2,500 for one, maybe two shows. On land he faced brutal travel, dingy stages and drunken hecklers. On board: lobster buffets, room service and all expenses paid.

Well, not all expenses. There is a price exacted by a life at sea. It's a heavy toll. Much more time on the cruise ships, and McDonald wouldn't be a comedian picking up some extra dough. He'd be a cruise ship comedian. He'd be Shecky.

Bumbeleo Time!

"It's Bumbeleo time!" shouts one



Landlubber Jim McDonald at a Hermosa Beach, Calif., comedy club. In the background, a heavily slathered McDonald from a can't-miss slide show gag: "Doctors recommend you use at least sunblock Number 15. I only brought sunblock Number 2, so I had to lay it on real thick."

of the bullfight dancers—or maybe it's a bullfight singer. Some dancers wearing fruit arrangements skip from stage left.

The crowd gapes. Maybe—this is the first-night performance—it's simply nausea, or reaction to the medication. There are 2,000 of us on board, most over 50, many obese. At this moment, about 600 of us gape.

"Can you feel the heat?" a shimmying banana asks, as a smoke machine pumps out greasy clouds of diesel-scented smog. If a cruise ship chorus girl yelled a question in the middle of the Caribbean, and no one answered, would Bumbeleo time suddenly stop? It seems not.

"Are you a party crowd?" a pineapple screams (with some hostility and desperation, it seems to me), and gets the same querulous, apparently medicated response. Now, people are worried. Husbands look at wives. Did the brochure say anything about responsive readings with fruitheads?

Bumbeleo time comes to an end—I think. Then it's Riverdance time, and after that, "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" time, and after that, It's "Memory" (from "Cats") time. There are many whiskers. There is an elaborate back-alley set complete with garbage cans. The smoke machine labors on.

McDonald, who has been sitting quietly, turns. He sees me watching him. How can he stand this? Everyone, of course, measures where he is against where he thought he would be. But not everyone's professional life provides such a vivid object lesson in the disconnect between aspiration and reality. Not every cruise ship comedian is cursed with a pitilessly keen vision of the world, and his place in it.

"Look," he says. "You're human. You have dreams of grandeur. If you're a dancer, you saw 'Flashdance,' you saw 'A Chorus Line,' then... you're dressed in a cat costume on a cruise ship, hiding in a garbage can, choking on the smoke machine."

A Burger and a Prayer

First thing every morning, he writes three pages in his journal. Then he types jokes for at least an hour and a half on his laptop computer. He boldfaces some of them, "ones I think are worth a try." His goal: to come up with two new bits weekly that make it from the computer to the stage.

(Here's a boldface bit: "Yeah, my brother and I used to share a room

and he used to talk in his sleep. Yeah, it was really annoying. He was always saying, 'Help! Stop! I can't breathe, that pillow is suffocating me!'")

"I'm not a comic genius," he says, "more like the little engine that could."

After the jokes, he works on a screenplay. He's completed one about a hockey team—"dramatic and pretty dark"—and is working on a script for the television show "Malcolm in the Middle." A plate of fruit for lunch, then a jog through an island's hills, or around and around the ship's exercise deck (12 laps is a mile), which irritates some of the fat guys at the open-air bar, "but hey, I'm not complaining about their cigars and their scotches, so I try to ignore them." Then he does 100 push-ups, in sets of 50, 25 and 25, and leg lifts until he can't do them anymore. Afternoons, he edits his material, or goes surfing on one of the islands.

After dinner, it's dancing-fruit-heads time, and after that, he tries to read 50 pages, exactly, before sleep. For this trip, he's brought "Pay It Forward" and "Tuesdays With Morrie."

Once a week he buys himself a hamburger—Wendy's, if he can find one—and attends church, even on islands where the service isn't in English, "because it reminds me... how fortunate I am. In show business, it's easy to forget that."

He Walks the Line

Dinnertime, Day 3, at the staff mess, below decks. Two days till showtime. We could be sitting upstairs in the formal Orion Dining Room, surrounded by lobster and shrimp and Nehru-jacket-clad waiters. I wish we were sitting upstairs. But McDonald doesn't want to eat upstairs. "I like my audience," he says. "I just don't want to get to know them."

So we sup in the crew quarters, surrounded by Formica tables and metal chairs and steam trays full of chicken and spaghetti and dancers in sweat pants who look much better without the produce.

A chorus girl—I'm not sure but I think it's the screaming banana—stops by, asks McDonald how long he's on for. When she leaves, I waggle my eyebrows at him. Perhaps, later on, a little sweet Bumbeleo time for the funnyman?

He thinks not. "Things do happen out here," he says. "But I try to always wait a few days to see if someone comes up and says, 'Hey, watch

out for the girl who's involved with the real freaky guy.'" He dated a cruise ship singer once. "I felt like, 'Oh wow, she likes me.' Then I realized it was more like, 'Oh, wow, she likes everyone.'" He has also been hit on by passengers, but never responded. "Hookers are more subtle," he says.

As alluring but possibly poisonous former fruitheads circle our Formica table, McDonald admits that the parts of his act he lovesmost are the ones that cruise ship audiences hate. Two of his favorites are the LSD bit and the sex-and-Satan bit—and when he uses them on the ships, "it's like an elevator cable snapped. Especially the older people. I can see, they're with me, they're with me, they're with me, then I'll do the bit and BOOM! They're gone... lost."

He still tries those bits—it's a matter of artistic integrity. When they fail, which they almost always do, he can always rely on the slide show. It's his ship closer, his signature. Setup line, slide, setup line, slide: "Yeah, I worked with Kathie Lee Gifford on a cruise once," he'll say, then project an image of himself hunched over a sewing machine in a dark, dingy basement room. That always gets a huge laugh.

'I'm Not Going to Lie to You'

Thursday. Earlier today, he boldfaced. Later he will run. Tomorrow night, he will perform. But now, mid-afternoon, we are drinking coffee at the Ocean Grill on the 11th deck, at rest. The little engine is chugging to a standstill, and bone-weary despair is seeping out.

"I'm not gonna lie to you," he says. "I can't make a convincing argument that dropping ping-pong balls down someone's bathing suit is funny." Ping-pong-ball dropping is one of the activities cruise ship directors regularly organize for the guests. "But the passengers who like that sort of stuff," he says, "and there's an awful lot of people who do, God bless 'em."

"I'm not gonna lie to you," he says, "the Grand Buffet disturbs me." The Grand Buffet, served the second-to-last night of the cruise, is an odious and awesome cruise ship tradition, a midnight spread that takes 1,000 man-hours to prepare, uses 4,700 eggs, and features ice carvings, fish sculptures, a string quartet, and a spokeswoman with a microphone who announces the man-hours and fish sculptures.

"Especially after all the poverty we see on the islands where we stop," he says. "But the passengers

who like this stuff, God bless 'em."

"I'm not gonna lie to you," and "God bless 'em," I come to learn, are phrases the cruise ship comedian employs, singly or in combination, to discuss things he hates.

"I'm not gonna lie to you... If you want to get drunk every night and get [a lot of sex], working on cruise lines is one way to do it... And if you can do that, and if you can sleep at night, God bless you."

Between the Grand Buffet and the promiscuous drunks, he has raised his voice until he's almost shouting. Four couples walk past, laughing, happily inhaling each other's sweet and lusty suntan lotion fumes. These are folks who look as if they enjoy an occasional ping-pong ball down the back of their bathing suits, but they fall silent as they notice McDonald. The laughter dies abruptly as they glance our way, confused. The brochure did not mention angst-ridden cruise ship comedians seeping despair at the Ocean Grill.

McDonald ignores them. He's not gonna lie to you. He resents that he can't use his favorite material out here, like the one about women who smoke: "To a nonsmoker, there is nothing more disgusting than a smoker's breath—I think that's how all those weird sexual positions got started."

The bit goes on—he's got a whole riff—but if he chooses to use it, boom! Instant elevator cable-snapping time. He hates that. He hates a lot of things about life at sea—like the constant pressure to take laughs where he can get them, no matter how hackneyed the punch line, the temptation to give in, to neither boldface nor agonize over the sex and drugs and race and politics bits, to become just the kind of cruise ship hack land comedians view with contempt and pity.

For an ambitious cruise ship comedian with even a tiny measure of self-respect—for McDonald—working cruise ships means plying one's trade in the sixth circle of Comedy Hell, except with bingo games and midnight feeds. It's not telling gags at bar mitzvahs. But it's close.

God's Comic

Some cruise ship comedians drink a lot and chase all the fruitheads. Other cruise ship comedians spend most of their sea time working on video editing and corporate speechwriting. One guy e-mails in soap opera scripts. A joker who neither chases fruitheads nor moonlights—even with the gag writing and 50-pages-a-

night reading—tends to have a lot of time on his hands.

McDonald watches lots of television. That's what we're doing now, in Room 401, the portholed closet we've been sharing for nearly a week, watching television. It's a movie called "Black Dog," starring Patrick Swayze as an ex-con trucker trying to go straight, being chased by a villain played by Meat Loaf. Tomorrow night, our final night at sea, McDonald will perform, but tonight we're kicking back with our usual late-night snacks (fruit, cookies), continuing our week-long conversation about ambition and the nature of success, about comedy and hope. He wants to know my greatest unrealized dream. I make some noise about a novel (I like McDonald, but I refuse to be pitied by a cruise ship comedian), then ask what in his career has made him happiest.

"One time," he says, "I'm going up to run, and a little Jamaican guy comes up to me, a crew guy, and he says, 'Hey, mon, I see your show. I really like your show.' And you know what? Sometimes you feel really self-indulgent. You're not curing cancer or anything. But that little Jamaican guy—I made him feel good. That guy sweeps floors, he works hard for a living."

On TV, Meat Loaf is closing in on the troubled trucker, who spies a diner by the road and pulls his rig in. McDonald asks for some book recommendations. I offer a few titles, name a few writers I like. He puts his plate down (watermelon, honeydew), looks at me.

"Hey, man," he says. "Do you realize you're always describing a writer by how old he was when he first published? My friend, you gotta quit being so hard on yourself."

My friend? My friend? The room tilts. It is not a wave. No, the man who endures midnight buffets and medicated audiences and banana-headed choras girls and ping-pong-ball-dropping cruise ship directors, who not only attends church regularly and runs 40 minutes a day and does leg lifts until exhaustion and cranks out three pages in his journal before most people brush their teeth and comes up with two polished, boldfaced bits weekly and eats a hell of a lot of melon—he is reaching out to me. What makes him happiest is helping others.

Not to get too Sermon-on-the-Mountish about it, but this Willy Loman of the High Seas is trying to comfort the guy who has spent the better part of a week scribbling down evidence that he—the cruise ship comedian—is a walking, quipping, amusing yet poignant example of cheerful mediocrity... of noteworthy Not Getting It. Of failure.

In Room 401, during the third act of "Black Dog," halfway between Antigua and St. Thomas, an arm's length from my subject, bunkmate and hero, I feel a spiritual awakening: We are all cruise ship comedians, hawking our tinny wares, meekly demanding that attention be paid, rowing our little boats toward the green light against the relentless waves, whatever. None of us is exactly where he wants to be. Some of us are cynical, snarky, note-taking and vaguely embittered cruise ship comedians. Others are wise, blessed, loving cruise ship comedians. Fruit eaters of the sea. We have a choice.

I gnaw on my chocolate chip cookie, eyes brimming. Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama of cruise ship comedians regards Patrick Swayze chatting up the roadside waitress.

"All right!" McDonald says. "The truck stop scene! Hey, scramble me up some eggs, Sally, and give Meat Loaf a chance to catch us."

Satan Lives!

He's dying, but he is not dead. Even with the dozer in the fourth row, the coughers, the bingo losers, he is not dead. The last night of the six-night cruise. The 18th cruise of the year. The sixth year at sea. He never thought he'd be drifting so long. The rictus is so wide, so fierce, it looks like it might be frozen forever.

"My sister and her boyfriend

See COMIC, F5, Col. 1

That Sinking Feeling

COMIC, From F4

came on a cruise," he says. "You know how romantic it is. (Leer, beat.) They stopped on a secluded beach, and they did what honeymooners do. And nine months later (leer, beat) they were released from a Puerto Rican prison."

Finally. A surge—an actual surge—of laughter.

"We all had nicknames in our family," he says. "We called my grandmother 'Gram.' (Beat.)

"Because of the drug problem."

It works, which is a surprise, considering the material, the living dead bingo people, the final night. Emboldened, McDonald brings out the boldface bits.

He tries the sleep-talking brother. He knows that's a funny bit. Silence. Retreat to the familiar stuff.

"Yeah, I was on a cruise once, we stopped at St. Martin. Great island—half Dutch, half French. (Beat.) Topless women wearing wooden clogs. (Beat.) You could hear 'em coming!" Huge laugh.

"My sister has two small children and you wouldn't believe how demanding they can be. I took the kids to the zoo, and they almost drove me crazy with their annoying questions."

"Why can't we have some cotton candy?"

"Cause it'll rot your teeth."

"Why can't we have a hot dog?"

"Cause it'll spoil your appetite."

"Why do we have to climb the fence?"

"Look, do you want to pet the lions or not? Now hurry up and get into your zebra costumes."

Monster laughs. This is the moment to milk the family chunks—the nephew and the after-shave, the mother and the allowance, the Hare Krishna brother-in-law. The family chunks always get laughs. He could do 20 minutes of family stuff. Maybe he *should* do 20 minutes of family stuff.

He won't, though. If he did, he'd be Sheeky.

"Have any of you ever sailed on Carnival lines? Yeah, I thought so. They're the fun, cheaper line, right? Wild! But you know, I sympathize with a woman who goes on a Carnival cruise. It's very hard to find a formal evening gown that matches your tattoo of Satan."

Miraculously, howling. Chortling. Applause.

He does some birth control bits,



COURTESY JIM McDONALD

"Yeah, I worked with Kathie Lee Gifford on a cruise once," says McDonald in one of his slide projector sight gags.

some Catholic bits. He even rolls out the LSD bit, complete with the reverb dream sequence.

Tears of mirth.

The cruise ship comedian connects like this rarely—maybe once in a while with a younger group from New York—but never on a last-night-of-the-cruise, preoccupied-with-packing show, never with a bunch like this. But he's connecting now. At this moment, McDonald could read a sausage recipe and the toilet joke lovers would chortle. But he's got something better than a sausage recipe. He's got the slide show. His signature. Never fails, often kills, occasionally destroys.

But tonight—with a house that's going nuts for the Grandma's got a drug problem bit... and the LSD bit... and Satan... tonight, the slide show will annihilate.

If only the remote control worked.

"Yeah, I worked with Kathie Lee Gifford on a cruise once," he says. He pushes the button to activate the slide projector. Nothing. He pushes again. Nothing.

"Uh, guys," he says, looking up at the sound booth, "I'm not getting anything." He pantomimes pushing the remote control, keeps talking, chides the engineers some more. Chuckling, relaxed chiding, of course. A crowd can smell panic. Still nothing.

Eating it onstage is always horrible, but this? This is something else. This is a man who has just transformed a floating cavern of dead-eyed, cruise-weary, bingo-sod-

den Babbitts into a yowling, clapping mass of merriment. This is a guy who with some spooky and baffling and utterly inexplicable cruise ship comedian alchemy—a pinch of Satan, a dash of Hare Krishna brother-in-law, a few sure-fire ship gags and a lifetime of little-engine-that-couldish grit and implacable faith—this is a guy who might have, who should have, produced a Miracle at Sea. This is a broken slide projector. This is unfair. This is unjust. This is doom.

He enters the crowd, walks up to the sound booth. He climbs into the booth, gets some titters for his effort. Nervous titters. He reloads the projector, sits in the window, twisting around to the control panel. He cracks wise about yoga positions. Nothing.

A slide pops on the screen, out of focus. He adjusts that, but then another slide pops up, also out of focus. Then the slides start popping up on their own, sad, blurry pictures yearning for setup lines.

He is helpless. He apologizes, thanks the crowd, apologizes again. "I have a lot more jokes," he says, as they stream out the exits, to pack and figure out their tips and wonder what went wrong with the cruise ship comedian.

"I have a lot more jokes," he says again, through the rictus. "I just haven't written 'em yet."

Listening Closely

The night of the Grand Buffet, we line up with the passengers, in the formal dining room. Shoulder to shoulder with people he likes but doesn't want to get to know, surrounded by jello sculptures and fish carvings and pastry art, the almost unspeakably excessive consequences of 4,700 eggs and 1,000 man-hours and a single-minded dedication to gluttony, McDonald smiles. Not the long-range rictus, but an actual smile. A happy face. In the midst of this ode to excess, this monument to cheesiness, this celebration of all that he loathes, this life that he fears, he smiles, because he hears something sublime.

It is the string quartet.

He gazes toward the musicians, head slightly cocked, a look both appreciative and calculating.

"Begin the Beguine," he says. He won't stop smiling. "Cole Porter. I heard he tried to write a new song every day."

BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

North-South vulnerable

NORTH
♠ Q 10 9 5
♥ Q J 3
♦ A Q 7 3
♣ Q 3

WEST
♠ 8 2
♥ K 7 4
♦ 9 6 4 2
♣ A K J 7

EAST
♠ 7 4
♥ 9 8 6 2
♦ K 10 8
♣ 10 8 5 4

SOUTH (D)
♠ A K 16 3
♥ A 10 5
♦ J 5
♣ 9 6 2

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
4 ♠			
All Pass			
Opening lead: ♣ K			

"Your Honor," the district attorney announced, "the People will prove that East committed a felony, in that he let South make a hopeless contract."

"Ready for the defense," said Perry Mason, the

noted trial attorney.

"Proceed," the judge nodded.

"West took two clubs and led a trump," the DA said, "and South drew trumps and led the jack of diamonds: six, three, king. East then led a heart."

"South didn't finesse and go down?" queried the judge.

"South took the ace, ruffed his last club in dummy and ran his trumps," the DA responded. "In the end, West had to pitch a diamond to keep the king of hearts, and South got three diamond tricks and made game. But if East returns a diamond when he takes the king, he breaks up the squeeze, and the defense gets a heart."

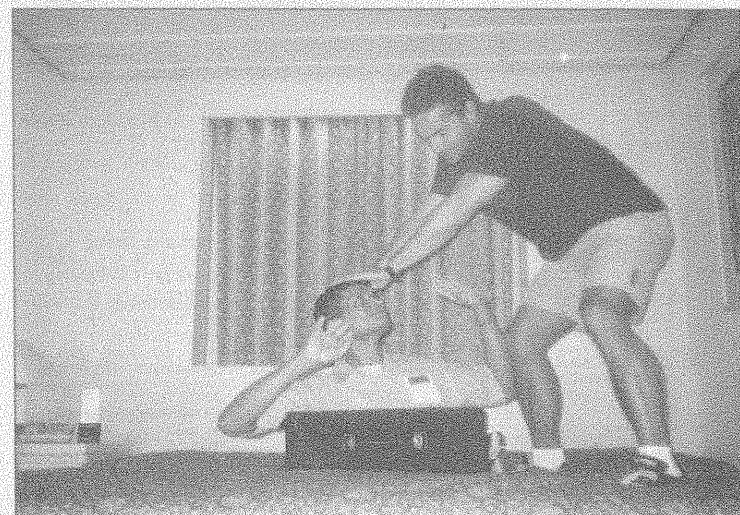
"It looks bad for your client, counselor," the judge told Mason.

"If it please the Court," Mason said, "the indictment of East is improperly worded. South's contract wasn't hopeless at all. South can be sure East has one king; if West had two kings in addition to his A-K of clubs, he'd act over South's opening bid."

"After South draws trumps," Mason went on, "he can lead a low diamond from dummy. East must take the king; and South later throws two hearts from his hand on the A-Q of diamonds. If West turned up with the king of diamonds, South could be sure the heart finesse would win."

"I hate to acquit on a technicality," sighed the judge, "but Mason is right. Release East. Arrest South."

© 2001 Tribune Media Services



Another slide gag: "Packing the last night of the cruise... No way I'm leaving my cabin steward behind."

Spring
CLEARANCE
SAVE UP TO
50% OFF
CHECK OUT
THE SAVINGS

Michaels

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS STORE®

ALL Spring "Silk" Floral

- Floral Coordinates Collections
- Spring Sensations Stems
- Regional Favorites
- Spring Floral

Includes bushes, garlands, swags, stems, candelings, picks and mini.

50% OFF
Our Everyday Price

GREAT FATHER'S DAY GIFT IDEA

Veritas® & Weston® Gallery Photo Frames
Hundreds of 2"x3" to 8"x10" styles.

30% OFF
Our Everyday Price

4-ft. "Silk" Ficus Trees
Includes 10" wicker basket.

14.99 Each
Reg. 19.99

Framed Art

- City Art
- Crystal Art
- Pinnacle

30% OFF
Our Everyday Price

7-Pack 7" Scented Tapers

7-Pack 10-Hour Scented Votives

YOUR CHOICE

1.39 Each
Reg. 1.99

Whirly Wheels
42" tall pinwheels with a whirly bloom about 2-ft. wide.

5.99 Each
Reg. 9.99

ALL Plaster Pedestals
Finished and ready to finish styles.

30% OFF
Our Everyday Price

ALL Spring Country Home Collection Ribbon

50% OFF
Our Everyday Price