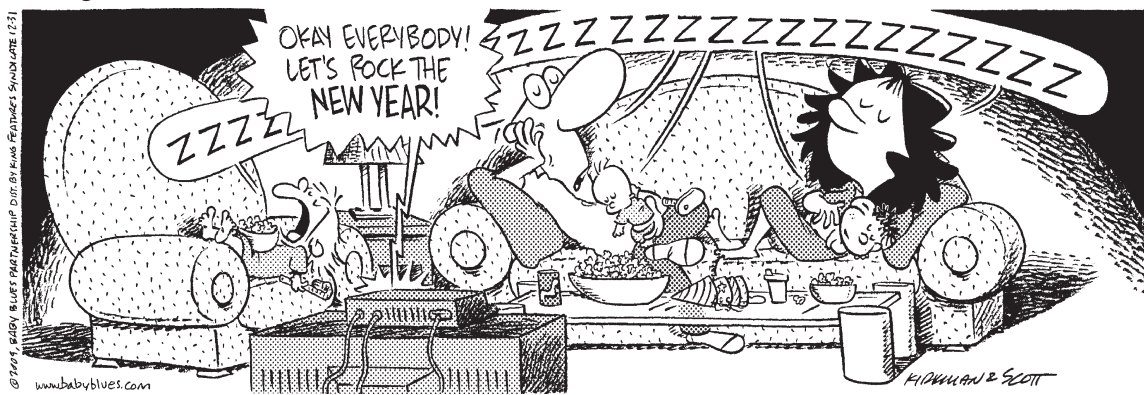


**Baby Blues** • Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



**Beetle Bailey** • Mort Walker



**Blondie** • Chic Young



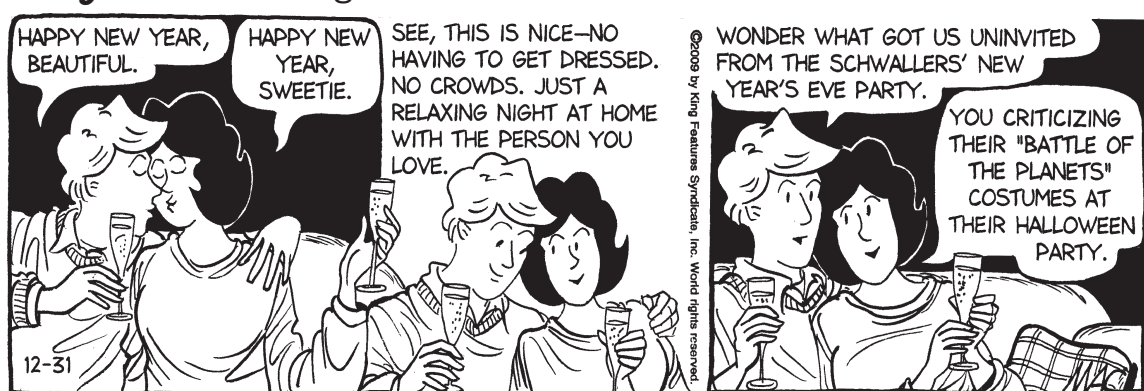
**Hagar the Horrible** • Chris Browne



**Mother Goose and Grimm** • Mike Peters



**Sally Forth** • Greg Howard



**Todd the Dinosaur** • Patrick Roberts



**Zits** • Jim Borgman & Jerry Scott



**Dr. Joyce Brothers**  
• Ask Dr. Brothers  
**She doesn't want to lose grandchild**

**Dear Dr. Brothers:** My son recently separated from his wife, and they've filed for divorce. Their split seems to be an amicable one, with everyone OK with the decision. There's only one person who's not fine with it - me! I will miss visiting my grandchild on weekends, and am concerned I won't be able to see him. It's a do-it-yourself divorce, and no one wants to get legal about grandparents. I'm on my own. Any advice? - B.L.

**Dear B.L.:** If you are not the only grandparent, it might be a good time to approach your son and his ex and ask them if they could help you set informal guidelines that all grandparents could follow so the little boy is not torn away from you or left to suffer under the whims of one parent. The fact that it is an amicable divorce is a good sign. Should they have gone through a mediation process, chances are the grandparents would have been considered and visitation agreed upon. This probably still could be worked in, but if no one wants to formalize your rights, you can explain to the mother you simply want continuity with your grandchild, and see how she responds.

Since both your son and his soon-to-be-ex-wife have your grandson's best interests at heart, they may welcome your continued relationship. You may be more comfortable seeing the boy with his father until he gets old enough to meet on neutral ground. Even if there is lack of enthusiasm about seeing you, letting him know you are there for him is something you should be able to accomplish. Your son probably will want to help keep you together. So don't be afraid to speak up, even though you haven't been a presence during the divorce process.

**Dear Dr. Brothers:** My friends love to set me up with someone. It's become a game to them to invite a nice single guy they know along with us when we go out and then ask me incessantly afterward if I liked him. It's aggravating. I'm really OK with not being in a relationship right now. I probably will want to get married sometime in the future, but I'm fine right now. How do I get them to stop? - J.A.

**Dear J.A.:** I know it must be aggravating to have your friends put you in a position to be auditioning guys. You must feel you hardly ever relax when you go out, because everyone is casting glances your way to see if there is chemistry. If you explained that you'd feel more at ease if they would not think of matches every time you went out, they might cease and desist.

But give them a break. They think they are contributing to your happiness. It's a compliment to have them fix you up - they must think you're a good catch. That's not bad! And should you decide to give one of these guys a chance, it's a good bet you will have something in common, as your friends know both of you. So, be flexible if you dare - it's not about getting married, it is about perhaps adding something to your life. In the meantime, ask your friends to consult you before they bring suitors along.

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**Family Circus** • Bil Keane



12-31 © 2009 Bil Keane, Inc. Dist. by King Features Synd. www.familycircus.com "Mommy says we get to have midnight at 9 o'clock!"

**Conceptis Sudoku** • Dave Green

2								8
	4	2		6	3			
	5		9		1			
7								3
	9				6			
4								9
	1		5		8			
	8	1		9	4			
9								7

Difficulty Level ★★★ 12/31

This is a logic-based number placement puzzle. The goal is to enter a number, 1-9, in each cell in which each row, column and 3x3 region must contain only one instance of each numeral. The solution to the last Sudoku puzzle is at right.

9	1	4	3	5	8	6	7	2
8	3	7	2	1	6	9	4	5
2	6	5	7	9	4	8	1	3
6	7	1	8	3	2	5	9	4
3	9	8	4	6	5	7	2	1
4	5	2	9	7	1	3	6	8
5	2	3	6	4	7	1	8	9
7	4	9	1	8	3	2	5	6
1	8	6	5	2	9	4	3	7

**Cryptoquip**

BT EP XPZRPTBPON QRJEU  
BA ARVVPBF WRXNWU, KCEG  
QBFCG URX ZEW W GCEG

AZOPEJBR? WRAO OOW VEKW.  
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: PEOPLE DEFINITELY FIND OUR POSTMAN MORE FRIGHTENING THAN YOURS, SO HE'S THE SCARIER CARRIER.  
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals E

**Crossword** • Eugene Sheffer

**ACROSS**

- Get ready quickly?
- Weep
- Skilled
- Atmosphere
- Hatchery
- "Family"
- Use scissors
- Symbol of wisdom
- Banner
- Cooks clams, maybe
- Czech capital
- "Of course"
- Mid-afternoon, maybe
- Castro's land
- Serbian city
- Chowed down
- Eggs
- Sister
- Roared
- Second-hand

**DOWN**

- Free ticket
- Smallest of the litter
- Canal zone?
- Tropical fruit
- Weapon for Robin Hood
- Tier
- Kennel sound
- Catered event
- Waterloo people
- Waikiki winding
- Lip
- Yours truly
- Predetermine the outcome
- Taxi
- 4x4, for short
- Hotel staffers
- First lady
- Spotted beetles
- Payable
- Conclusion
- Crook during a power outage
- Have bills
- Matchless
- On the other hand
- Beige
- Makes sounds
- Sandwich shop
- As is fitting
- Queue
- Greek vowels
- Wrestling surface

**Solution time: 25 mins.**

A	G	A	R	P	H	D	C	R	U	D
L	O	V	E	R	O	E	H	O	L	E
B	O	O	M	T	O	W	N	A	O	N
A	P	N	E	A	T	H	O	M	A	S
			D	R	A	B	I	S	M	
L	A	Z	Y	R	O	O	T	A	Y	E
E	G	O	L	O	O	M	S	T	O	N
D	O	O						F	E	U
			M	R	S		E	N	G	R
P	O	L	I	T	E		Y	I	E	L
A	L	E	S			D	O	O	M	S
W	I	N	K		G	A	D		K	I
N	O	S	Y		E	K	E		S	E

Yesterday's answer 12-31

**Bridge** • Steve Becker

North dealer. Neither side vulnerable.

**NORTH**  
 ♠ A K Q J 3  
 ♥ Q 9 5 3 2  
 ♦ A  
 ♣ Q 9

**EAST**  
 ♠ 8 6  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ 8 6 3  
 ♣ A J 10 8 7 6 5 2

**SOUTH**  
 ♠ 10 9 5  
 ♥ K J 10 9 7 5 4  
 ♦ K 3

The bidding:  
 North East South West  
 1 ♠ 4 ♣ Pass Pass  
 Dble Pass 5 ♦  
 Opening lead — jack of hearts.

**Variety, the Spice of Life**  
Pre-emptive bids often force the opponents to guess what to do at a high level of bidding and might well nudge them into an inauspicious contract.

Today's deal is from the World Top Invitational Pairs, held in 1988 in the Netherlands. Following North's opening bid, every East pre-empted with four clubs, after which the various paths diverged.

Some Souths found the winning response of four spades, which ended the auction. East led the club ace and continued with the jack at trick two, requesting the return of the higher-ranking side suit, hearts. West ruffed and obliged by returning a heart, but East's ruff proved to be the last trick for the defense.

One North-South pair wound up in five spades. The defenders took the same three tricks to produce a one-trick set.

Certainly the most unusual result occurred at the table where the bidding went as shown and North-South got to five diamonds, missing their spade fit altogether. Unfortunately, poor defense then snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

If West leads his singleton club, the defenders should score the same three tricks - the club ace, a club ruff and a heart ruff. (Even if South false-carded by dropping the club king under the ace, a club return is East's only reasonable play.) But West chose to lead a heart, ruffed by East.

All East had to do now was to play the ace and another club. But for reasons best known to himself, East elected to underlead the ace of clubs! A surprised declarer won with the king, led a diamond to the ace, ruffed a heart and laid down the diamond king. When the queen came tumbling down, South ended up with an overtrick!

Considering the bidding and play at this table, the tournament might have been more aptly named the World Bottom Invitational Pairs!  
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