

Old friend has ghosted, should she still get a birthday party invite?

DEAR ERIC: I became friends with one of my oldest and closest friends when we were 9 years old.

In the last three years, it has been nearly impossible to see her. I routinely sent her text messages and voicemails asking if she wanted to get together. I finally resorted to sending her a message on Facebook.

R. Eric Thomas
Asking Eric



I was very surprised with her response that came several days later. She said that I had not responded to a text a few years ago when she asked if we could get dinner and didn't think that I valued her friendship, and therefore she

wasn't going to put energy into it, because it was very painful for her.

I was baffled, sent her screenshots of my text messages asking when we could get together, call logs of unanswered and unreturned phone calls, invitations to events she didn't respond to, and apologized if she felt that I had not prioritized her as a friend. She never responded.

On her 40th birthday, I sent her a brief text message wishing her a joyful year ahead and said that I knew things were uneasy between us and I would really love a chance to sit down together and have a conversation to repair the friendship. She has not responded. Friends are beginning to plan my 40th birthday celebration and I have opted not to include her as a guest, out of respect for her feelings.

My husband feels that this is profoundly the wrong thing to do, and that if anything, I should send her the invitation and give her a phone call letting her know that I would really appreciate the chance to get together.

What is the right thing to do in this situation? — Broken Friendship

DEAR FRIENDSHIP: The safest thing is to invite her to the party. But the safe bet may not be the best bet for you. You've reached out multiple times in various forms and also apologized for something that seems more like a narrative she invented.

It's normal for friendships to experience different seasons, especially as the complications of raising children, work and distance make time scarcer. It seems she's being awfully ungenerous to you.

If you invite her to your 40th, you may be setting yourself up for another disappointment. Whereas, if you and your friend are able to reconnect at another time, she can join you at future birthdays, without the tension hanging over everything.

DEAR ERIC: I am 66 and live by myself. I feel so alone. I took care of my husband for 18 year so there wasn't much time to make friends. How or where do I start to find friends? — Wanting Company

DEAR COMPANY: Start with what you enjoy. What hobbies or activities pique your interest? You can do a general search or look on sites like Meetup to get started. Or try something new. Explore something you've never thought about before. Take a tap dance class or a pottery course; join a book club.

Reach out to your local senior center, the AARP, or YMCA to see what they're offering. Something as simple as a meal or a movie night can introduce you to new people.

Many readers have also written about the community they find at places like The Villages (vtnetwork.org), which is a network designed to help elders age in place through activities, volunteer opportunities and logistical support like rides.

DEAR ERIC: I recently attended a concert where the audience sat for most of the concert and stood up for three or four songs.

However, the person directly in front of me stood up for the entire concert, completely blocking my view.

When I informed the person that they were ruining my experience, the person told me it was their right to stand.

I asked an usher for help, but they refused to step in.

Do you think it is appropriate for someone to be so inconsiderate? What is the correct etiquette at a concert? — No View of the Stage

DEAR STAGE: Concerts are a rare social space where it's appropriate, even encouraged to stand if you can and want to. That doesn't negate your right to enjoy yourself, too. But it might require some creativity. Is it possible to ask a nearby stander if you can switch places or ask an usher if you can move to a different seat.

There are plenty of places where standing is going to be a no-go. I can't imagine standing through "Hamlet" unless I'm at the Old Globe, for instance. Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" may have originally incited a riotous response, but people generally sit for it nowadays. However, depending on the type of music and the vibe of the concert, it may be necessary to find an alternative to ensure maximum enjoyment.

Send questions to R. Eric Thomas at eric@asking-eric.com or P.O. Box 22474, Philadelphia, PA 19110.

CRYPTOQUOTE

One letter stands for another.

In this sample — **AXYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW** —

A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

V W Q T T I F H F Y S U T F Y V B X

H B X V T Y B E F V Y K T R B O V W Y P .

— S F Y V P Y K J B X

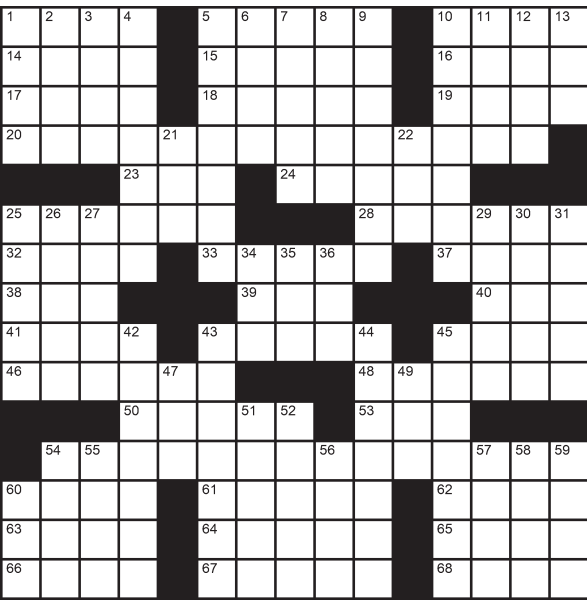
THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

ACROSS

- Use the phone
- Refereed a baseball game
- Joe Kernen's network
- Region
- Indian wheat bread
- Enjoy a book
- Dryer fluff
- Actress Dern
- "I'm all ___!"
- Trend-settingly stylish: 2 wds.
- Historic period
- Small mistakes
- Had in common
- Come forth
- Toy dogs, for short
- Keeps for later
- College housing
- Flightless bird
- Pastor's title: Abbr.
- Silent
- Egg-laying spot
- Behaved
- ___ moons ago
- Had visions at night
- Happenings
- Sandwich shops
- Girl in the fam
- Hands-on training period
- Norway's capital
- Battery part
- Mysterious glow
- Bath soap brand
- ___ Deadly Sins
- Big smile
- Copenhagen native
- Dog's reward
- If not

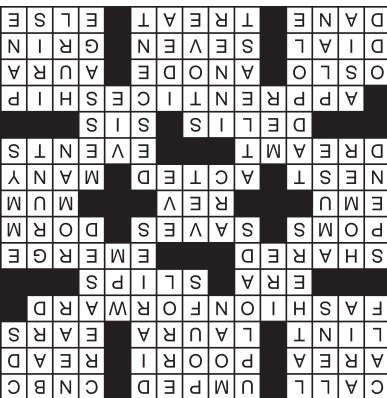
DOWN

- Baby cow
- Opera solo
- Microscope part
- Makes suds
- Saves to the cloud



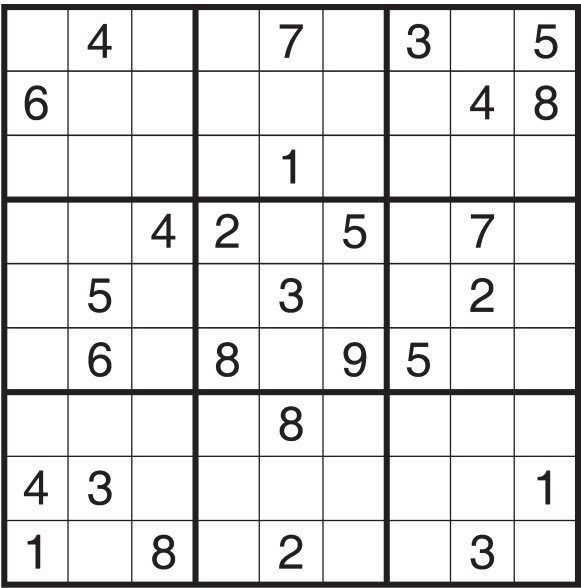
Created by Stella Zawistowski 1/21/26

Today's solution



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- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 44 Family origin | 54 Largest continent |
| 45 Email or text | 55 Think ahead |
| 47 "La ___" (Debussy piece) | 56 "What's the big ___?" |
| 49 Contend | 57 Throw forcefully |
| 51 Word before "peace" or "sanctum" | 58 Showy spring flower |
| 52 Kitchen range | 59 Window section |
| | 60 Unusual |



SUDOKU

How to play: Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9.

HOROSCOPE

JAN. 21

ARIES (March 21-April 19) You might process an old disappointment — what they did is on them, learning the lesson and releasing it is your silver lining. Accountability is important, always assign it to the right person.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) Integrate 3-D understanding with higher guidance for the most powerful approach. A strategic alliance could boost confidence and allow both of you to rise. Be discreet if you don't know someone well.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20) You might find the 'channel' you've been looking for your whole life, there could be some seriously valuable intel that can finally come in for you. Don't let your career mood hinge on other's choices.

CANCER (June 21-July 22) Someone who has some sway in your life could finally get enough clarity to come on board in a more helpful way. Make the connection happen if you can. Remember that comparison is a thief of joy.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) A partner or counterpart could have the answer you need ready to go. Don't let yourself get discouraged about a situation needing improved cooperation, this one may need time to resolve, try to let it go for now.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) If you've even wanted to step up as a mentor, now could be an excellent time. Offering helpful knowledge is one of the best ways to pay it forward. A partner could need emotional support.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) Some discouragement over an attempt to help gone wrong could crop up now. Not everything goes as humanly-planned but most things work out the way they need to from the perspective of the Universe.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) You might know exactly what to do with a domestic situation, the fix could be approved of by all. The heart might be able to understand something new when calmly and logically presented.

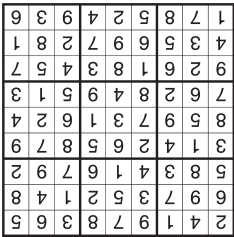
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) When your mind is clear, your confidence can be strong. Speak out from that place of clarity if motivated. Don't take it as a personal fail if a plan does not work out as you hoped.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) Disloyalty from a friend can cut deep even if you understand what they deal with. Guard confidences well, uphold boundaries, and understand that people can only act from their current level of awareness.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) Your mind is one of your greatest tools, as you learn to trust your thinking you build your inner sovereignty. Disentangle feelings from a financial situation, they won't help you cut to the chase.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) Past mistakes are the greatest university ever, harvest their full value for a PhD in self-mastery. Set aside shame, it takes lots of practice, but you have to if you want to learn from the past to build a stronger future.

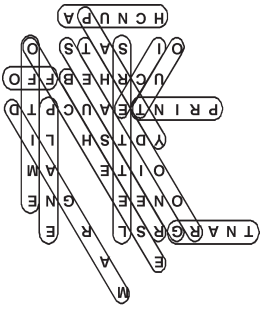
Sudoku solution



Jumble solution

PLANT GRIME INVITE DISCUS
The carpenters were stuck in traffic instead of —
DRIVING NAILS

Sleuth solution



JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

NPTAL

MIERG

IVNEIT

UCDSIS

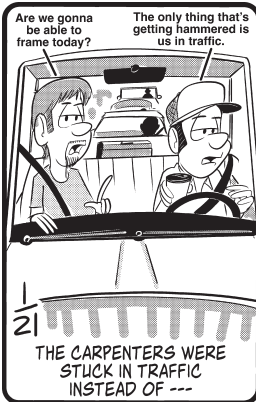
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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



WORD SLEUTH • BLOCK —

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

Tuesday's unlisted clue: YURT

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions - forward, backward, up, down and diagonally. Wednesday's unlisted clue hint: BLOCK AND —

A punch	Ice	Off	Print
Buster	Letters	Out	Seating
Diagram	Of cheese	Party	The door
Grant	Of time	Plane	

SHEFFER CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- May
- honoree
- Citrus drink
- Nickel-odeon's "Explorer"
- Falls into a chair
- Put through a sieve, as potatoes
- Sea off Sicily
- Cafeteria meals for students
- Darjee-ling, e.g.
- Shock partner
- Literary collections
- Length times width
- Trojan War story
- Sun-powered
- Eve's mate
- Ship's frame

27 Comic

- Romano
- Heat to near boiling
- Narc's org.
- Communal meals at a place of worship
- Decline to participate
- Competitor brand
- Mattress
- Skip brand
- Ob-serve
- Erie Canal
- More recent

DOWN

- Frap-puccino
- Popular layered cookie
- "Material Girl" singer
- Vocally
- Marie's brother
- Monu-mental
- "Monop-oly" cubes
- Heaps
- African desert
- Letters after Q
- 12 More recent

14 Pencil

- filler
- Mer-maid's home
- Goal
- 100 percent
- The Gem State
- Two-point shots
- "Star Trek" helms-man
- Veterans
- Curved line
- "— luegol!"
- Sports-cast offering
- Para-trooper's need
- One with a pitchfork
- Part of Q.E.D.
- Visual commu-nication syst.
- Num-bered rds.
- Fine cotton

Solution time: 23 mins.



Today's solution

