

# I'm Out of A Job ... What Do I Do?

By MAGGIE FRANK

Dear Cary,

I've been reading your Salon.com column religiously since you started writing it four years ago, but I never thought I'd have occasion to write to you. But here I am, in my mid-20s, a student at one of dozens of schools that churns out wide-eyed, go-getter, aspiring journalists each year. And what awaits us once we leave this place?

Well, that's what I'm writing to ask you. I fear it's a seat in the corner, next to the mailroom, fact-checking articles and compiling editorial listings. I'll be out there, Cary, alone in my cubicle, thankful that I at least got a cubicle, and wondering what's next. I feel invisible. How did I get here? And how do I make my way from here to the ranks of advice columnist for a successful online magazine?

Is it your writing style? I've noticed that when you respond to someone with a problem, you write in a style that seems meant to calm him or her. What are some of the other tactics you use when you sit down to respond to a letter?

Tribulating in Tribeca



nounced that he no longer wanted to do it, so a search for a replacement began. And I noticed week after week in the editorial meeting that no one had been found. After several weeks, it seemed as though they really needed somebody, so I volunteered. And I had the right tone, and so they hired me.

My style you refer to is a voice that comes partly out of stripping away the hysteria and the junk from the prose until only the important words are left. It is partly about a steadiness in the voice, which I try to cultivate for its own sake as a literary voice but also because I do think when you strip away the junk from prose it begins to sound more grounded, and perhaps has that calming effect.

Dear Cary,

So, you get to tell people what they ought to do about their problems all the time. But do you do as you say? What are your recent transgressions?

Skeptical in Sunnyside

mean? I'm not sure. I'm just trying to answer your question. I am afraid that I am mostly haunted by a feeling that I am a hypocrite, that I am a performer, that I do a certain kind of shtick that is so far from the grumpy, slovenly, insensitive and thoughtless person I normally am as to be something of a charade.

Nonetheless, one tries, no? I have created a persona of a thoughtful, insightful, somewhat poetic person, and that is better than nothing. Even if I fall short so often—as in constantly? That is the essence of the striving for a better self, I guess—that we must first envision the better self, and in doing so feel acutely the distance.

Dear Cary,

You tackle some difficult topics in your letters. You've counseled a few writers contemplating suicide, cheaters and the cheated on, serial liars, and even horny pregnant women. But do you ever receive letters that you just don't feel qualified to answer? Like, letters from writers who have experienced serious trauma or abuse and are coming to you for answers? Or letters that are just too creepy to answer?

Curious in Canarsie

Dear Tribulating,

This is a long story.

Here is what I find significant about how I became an advice columnist. I learned in AA that one's purpose at work is to help—not to demonstrate one's genius, but to be useful. Being an advice columnist was not my idea. My idea was to somehow demonstrate to the world my great talent in fiction (which I have not demonstrated to this point, and which had precious little to do with my job at Salon, which was to run the copy department). Now, what happened was Garrison Keillor, who was writing the "Mr. Blue" column, an-

Dear Curious,

I do not feel unqualified to answer any letter because I do not think of myself as a person with answers. I just think of myself as a stranger on a park bench who listens to people's woes. But I often do feel it's useful to try to do some reading on the subject before replying. There is great freedom in knowing you don't have the answers!

Yours, Cary T.

Cary Tennis has been Salon.com's advice columnist since 2001. His column appears every weekday.

Cary Tennis illustration by Zach Trenholm

leaving Maer Roshan in search of a new sugar daddy.  
**December 18, 2005** Time names Bono and

**February 7, 2006** The United States of America apparently remains as puritani-

Bill and Melinda Gates its Persons of the Year.

cal as ever—the 2006 Hollywood issue of Vanity Fair prompts condemnation, as well as ballyhoo, when actors Keira Knightley and Scarlett Johans-

son appear nude on the cover along with a clad Tom Ford.  
**February 9, 2006** On the off chance that readers just can't get their

fill of gossip reading The New York Post's Page Six, media mogul Rupert Murdoch launches Page Six, The Magazine.

**February 13, 2005** The Shape of the Future? Emap, a UK magazine publisher, launches Mooky, a "digital video