In "A New Logology Cash Contest" in the May 1974 issue of Word Ways, Ralph Beaman invited readers to discover the linguistic principle governing the choice of thirteen words of one to six letters in length. To make the contest more difficult, he did not specify these words directly, but merely hinted at them using one-word definitions. His solution to the contest is paraphrased below:

I seek the shortest words using more and more of the earliest letters of the alphabet. Thus, the first word is A; the second and third words are AB and BA; and the three three-letter words are ABC, BAC, and CAB. The next step is to find words using ABCD. Note that there are five dashes for the word corresponding to "measure" -- thus, one must use one extra letter, forming CABDA. The next set, for ABCDE, also calls for one extra letter in each word; the six words corresponding to the definitions are BACKED, BECARD, BECLAD, BEDCAP, CABBED and CABLED.

I expect that the competent solver would note there is at least one common word missing from this set: BRACED. The next set, as indicated by a question mark, calls for BOLDFACE or FEEDBACK, two eight-letter words using the first six letters. (Here, some comment on the allowability of FEDBACK or FEDBACK might be in order.) BRIGHT-FACED is an eleven-letter word using the first nine letters of the alphabet; I do not know whether words of equal or shorter length exist for ABCDEFG and ABCDEFGH. The three horizontal question marks invite the truly dedicated solver to expand the concept of the shortest words using letter strings broadly: for example, HIGH-FED uses the letters DEFGH (and one extra H).

Subsequently, he noted that acronyms opened other possibilities: the January 7, 1974 issue of Newsweek magazine reported on a canine birth control device known as ABCD (for Agrophysics Breeding Control Device). No doubt even longer acronyms have been coined.

Unfortunately, this contest proved less than transparent to Word Ways readers. Although several different people attempted the puzzle, the editor knows of only three people who successfully penetrated the enigma: Darryl Francis, Murray Pearce and Mary Youngquist. All three solutions were meritorious, going beyond the bare bones identification of the thirteen words to suggest possibilities, both real and coined, overlooked by the constructor. Consequently, it was a difficult matter to identify the contest winner.

Darryl Francis and Murray Pearce both noted BACE in the Oxford English Dictionary, and speculated that BACED was an acceptable past tense. Darryl also noted that ABC (to recite the alphabet) is cited as...
a verb in the OED, so that ABCED is plausible. Murray Pearce sug-
gested the coinage DECAB by analogy to the frequently-used DEPLANE. Mary Youngquist added ABDUCE, BRACED and CAR BED to the six-
letter list; Murray Pearce found the first two of these, as well as
BACHED and CAMBED (both inferred past tenses of Websterian words)
and DEBACE (in the OED).

Moving up to the next level, Mary suggested BACK-FED (by infer-
ence from the word BACK-FEED in Webster’s Third), while Murray
observed that Webster’s Second listed BIFACE as a noun (had it been
a verb, BIFACED might be inferred). Mary added that BALD FACE,
BOLDFACE, RIB-FACED, FEEDBACK and BACKFEED are all eight-
letter words using the first six letters of the alphabet.

Both Mary and Murray suggested the logical coinage BIG-FACED,
an eight-letter word using the first seven letters of the alphabet, and
both also found BRIGHT-FACED. No one was able to find a word using
the first eight letters of the alphabet but not I.

Looking under the entry JUMPING FROG in Webster’s Second, Mary
noted "The Celebrated Jumping Frog ..." in the italicized title of a
book by Mark Twain; this contains the first ten letters of the alphabet.
She also observed that JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDE, a phrase in boldface
in Webster’s Third, lacks only the letter G in the first ten.

Finally, Murray Pearce wrote: "There are many other words of
various lengths containing various consecutive groups of the alphabet;
the densest examples, aside from those already given, include RUST,
STUV, STRUV and FEIGH".

For diligence in searching for words exhibiting the properties of
Ralph Beaman’s original list (especially her partially-successful
search for phrases containing A through J), Mary Youngquist has the
edge. On the other hand, Murray Pearce was the only contestant to
generalize the problem to other sections of the alphabet. Unable to
compare these two different achievements, the judges decided to split
the prize and award it to both.

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Rochester, N.

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