

MOTHER OF ANAGRAMS

SUSAN THORPE

Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England

Some mothers, as we all know, have definite delusions of grandeur and have to be brought gently down to earth. Endeavoring to distract my mother's attention from her latest **bête noir**, I used a colloquialism when I said "DIG MENSA, MA", while explaining to her the round table organisation for people with high IQs. I went on to say that each time I receive A MIND GAMES magazine, I turn my attention to all the MAD ENIGMAS in it. I swear her ears really did prick up! A committed puzzler from that moment on, she demanded to be allowed to borrow my current issue but I was engrossed in other reading matter. I'D A MEN'S MAG open on my lap at the time! Hastily hiding the offending item, I said "When I have finished with it, MA, I SEND MAG to my friends SAM AND MEG. I know they appreciate it AND MEG'S AIM in life is to become a member of that organisation. Quick as greased lightning, MAMA SIGNED the form which would enable her to receive her own copy every two months. The other day she actually solved one of the puzzles and that MADE MA SING (what a noise!), but soon, as is her wont, she was criticising the puzzles, suggesting indeed that the whole enterprise was MISMANAGED!

Last week, in a panic, she phoned me at work, complaining of a nasty smell in the house. Rushing home, I found her AMID GAS MEN, all having their elevenses! She was in her element, slanging the workmen for their slothful ways and they, understandably, left without completing the job! In exasperation I said "MA, I MEND GAS pipes; don't you recall the last time this happened?" (Had I mentioned that I am a whiz at any repairs and, in my job as a computer mechanic, I MEND AMIGAS all day long?)

Will the day ever arrive when MAMA DEIGNS to treat the human race in a civilised manner, I ponder whilst sprawled on the nearby beach one weekend? But, what was this? Did my ears deceive me? Is she really suggesting we join the holidaymakers in their favourite pastime of castle-building? Reeling from shock, I manage to mutter "Castles, in SAND? I'M GAME if you are!"

I should have known the respite was temporary. She went totally berserk during the storm here the other evening, going so far as to blame me for it. It had lasted half an hour, and with the thirty MINS. DAMAGE, the garden was an eyesore. Enough said!

Trying to relax in my armchair one balmy Sunday afternoon, I was jerked into wakefulness as the word **wartime** penetrated my subconscious. With a faraway look in her eyes, mother was once again reminiscing about those squeaky-clean 'MAN-MADE'

G.I.S and her special boyfriend, MAMA'S G.I. NED. "Money was no object to him; he had many a DIME" SANG MA. I often conjecture as to what happened to END MAMA'S G.I. affair but, fifty and more years on, I close my ears to it all now.

Surprisingly, mother still has one admirer, a neighbour with a Biblical name who, despite his many years, continues to run the jewellery shop in the high street. He, silly man, panders to her every whim and once, after he had moved some heavy item for her by 'royal command', I said to him "You must take care; at your AGE, MA MINDS about you very much". True, but not in the way he might think, I mused. Currently, I knew, she had her eye on a GEM IN ADAM'S shop and hoped to purchase it at an enormous discount. Behind his back, though, she had no qualms about criticising his ability to care for his much-loved twenty-year-old cat who, understandably, looked a bit worse for wear nowadays. "IS DAM' MANGE" she tells all and sundry; she revels IN MAD GAMES like this.

Occasionally she pretends to be an art expert and regales me with tales of the artists whose pictures she claims to have seen. Once I retorted "A DEGAS, MA'M, IN the local gallery? Are you sure it was one of his?"

Another hobby horse! I wasn't going to be allowed to forget that the local W.I. were shortly to celebrate their two-thousandth meeting. I reflected that, at the meeting following that special one, they would have discussed 'MMI' AGENDAS, each with its inevitable list of topics. All that 'chat' ... terrifying! Then I learnt that mother had entered the W.I.'s celebratory fancy-dress competition AS 'MEGA-MIND'. What sort of A DESIGN MAM will come up with for her costume I dread to think; the mind boggles (literally!). On the actual day, after the judging had taken place, it was all rather embarrassing and SAD. "GIMME AN award!" she yelled, her humble origins surfacing in no uncertain manner, "I know I've won!" Am I really expected to DIG MA'S MEAN, selfish attitude every day of my life (now I am **thinking** colloquially as well)? FGAD! MAM'S IN real trouble this time! I crept away.

Talking about clothes and such reminds me of another time when she was showing definite signs of mental instability and, before thinking twice, I had commented on the fact. "ME MAD? I SNAG my best sweater, and you ask me that!" she cried. "I'm sorry," I said, "I thought it had merely stretched a bit, a SAG. MA, I MEND woollies as well as pipes and computers," I added flippantly. "Clever, aren't we?" she retorted sarcastically. I should have known better! Then again, although she condescends to wear trousers (in more ways than one!), she was in a minority in never having purchased the blue variety so popular the world over, maintaining that the cloth wouldn't hold its shape. "DENIM SAG, MA," I said, "that's nonsense", but no joy!

One day, when she got particularly steamed up about something or other, I tried to calm her down by offering her a tippie of her favourite 'G and T', but not even this would satisfy her. "SAME DAM' GIN" she cried, "a change is what I need". "Just

A SMIDGEN, MA" I mistakenly persisted. "No, I want my tea; it's late" she replied. My watch said 2:00 PM, but MAM'S GAINED. At the time she was sitting close to the fire with her feet up, and the young girl who now brought in the tea pointed out "Your slippers have SINGED, MA'AM". As she plunged the offending footwear into the handy tropical fish tank, mother exclaimed, ungrateful as ever, "Even the MAID NAGS ME now". In near desperation, I just managed to keep my temper in check as I politely enquired "How many sugars in your tea, dear?" MA MADE 'SIGN' (it appears that her war might have ended at last!).

THE OXFORD THESAURUS, AMERICAN EDITION

Published by Oxford University Press in 1992 for an economical \$19.95, this thousand-page tome is a new reference in a very old field: the synonym dictionary originated by Roget. American lexicographer Lawrence Urdang has not only put together a work that is comprehensive and up-to-date (slang and colloquial terms are frequently recorded), but very user-friendly: a basic alphabetical list of approximately eight thousand main-entry words (abandon, abandoned, abbreviate ... zero, zest, zone, zoo) with synonyms and illustrative sentences, followed by a second alphabetical list of all the words appearing as synonyms (whether or not they appear elsewhere as main entries). Thus, one can work backwards and forwards to construct synonym networks (as, for example, in "Websterian Synonym Chains", May 1988). Curiously, if Word B is listed as a synonym of Word A, Word A is not necessarily listed as a synonym of Word B, even when both words are main entries - in graph-theoretic terms, the synonym network is a directed network. For example, the shortest synonym chain leading from white to black is apparently WHITE-ghostly-sinister-dark-BLACK, but the reverse takes only two steps, BLACK-deadly-WHITE.