

# The Style Invitational

## WEEK 99: WHAT'S WRONG WITH THESE PICTURES?



**This Week's Contest** was suggested by Jennifer Hart of Arlington, who wins a Russian-language Archie comic book. Jennifer proposes that you tell us What's Wrong With These Pictures? Choose one or more. First-prize winner gets a fabulous copper music box outhouse that plays "Those Were the Days" while the door swings open, revealing a little man engaged in traditional outhouse activity, a value of \$50. Runners-up, as always, get the coveted Style Invitational losers' T-shirts. Honorable mentions get

the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper stickers. Winners will be selected on the basis of humor and originality. Mail your entries to the Style Invitational, Week 99, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, fax them to 202-334-4312, or submit them via the Internet to this address: losers@access.digex.net. Entries must be received on or before Monday, Feb. 13. Please include your address and phone number. Winners will be announced in three weeks. Editors reserve the right to alter entries for taste, appropriateness or humor. No purchase necessary. Employees of The Washington Post and their immediate families are not eligible for prizes.

BY BOB STANKOVIC FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

### MISS MANNERS

## Indecent Disclosure

By Judith Martin

**T**he currently most annoying social question is "How does that make you feel?" Miss Manners is appalled at herself for being so surly as to mention this. What more polite inquiry could there be than one about someone else's feelings, particularly in reaction to some sort of event in that person's life?

Isn't worrying about the welfare of others what well-mannered people are supposed to do? Isn't the main premise of manners that one should be considerate of other people's feelings, which is hardly possible without some sort of clue as to what these feelings are?

And isn't the most charming way to start a conversation to offer the other person a chance to talk about the matters that most concern her or him? Why, the very question is offered as a pledge of flatteringly sympathetic interest.

Come to think of it, doesn't etiquette actually mandate a constant repetition of questions along those lines—from "How do you do?" to "How are you?" all the way to the currently popular "How's it going?"

Surely a more probing version, in which the query is put not merely as a convention to be repeated by rote, but with the apparent desire of getting a frank answer, has to be even better.

Right, right, right. All true. And it is hardly Miss Manners's job to squish that which is politely intended, even if she does have a quibble or two about the wording. She is certainly not going to declare the present habit rude.

But the fact remains that many people are being driven to irritability and impatience (two conditions not conducive to the practice of etiquette) by the particular way these inquiries are now being made.

The new form of this age-old polite-question may arise in response to good news or bad, a trivial event in a person's life or a major one. If you are newly married or newly bereaved, if you lost a game or won the lottery, had a haircut or had a disappointment—sooner, rather than later, someone is going to look you deep in the eyes and ask solicitously how that makes you feel.

If you brush it off by saying "Great!" or "I'm getting along fine," don't think that's going to be the end of it. You may still be pressed with "But how are you really?"

And if that doesn't bring on a more responsive answer, suggestions may be made of how you "must" feel—terrible, excited, nervous, whatever. Unaccountably, the suggestion will usually be on the bad side, even if the event itself is pleasant—one is supposed to feel

"ambiguous," if not actually "threatened," by happiness these days.

Parrying the question may bring on the insinuation that you are crushed under psychological barriers that ought to be overcome for your own mental health—as in, "You don't have to pretend with me. It's okay to feel bad."

Without actually condemning the new convention, Miss Manners wishes to point out some of the difficulties it creates.

First, this question rarely permits a satisfactory answer. We can all recall being asked, on one birthday after another, "So—how does it feel to be 10 (11, 12, 30, 40, 100) years old?" In the history of the civilized world, no one has yet come up with a clever response, or even one that left the person asked feeling anything but foolish.

Second, it may be an invasion of privacy. The current belief that people always feel better when they talk about their emotions fails to take into account that this depends on the people to whom they talk, and the prevailing conditions. Victims of tragedy who are grabbed on the scene and asked on television how they feel about it do not look noticeably relieved at the opportunity to talk; nor may those who are socially besieged.

Finally, Miss Manners's most serious objection is that such an inquiry encourages the idea that it is improper to have any mismatch between one's inner feelings and what one expresses socially. And this idea has been the enemy of courtesy.

Modern disapproval of any failure to communicate all feelings is justified not only on grounds of mental health, but of virtue. Anything short of full disclosure of everything has come to be taken as—at best—false shame or "denial." But more usually it is classified as dishonesty, as if honest people could allow themselves no privacy, and no choice of confidants.

Etiquette does not forbid the relief of total disclosure—but requires that this be done judiciously. The polite person does not want to appear to brag at good fortune, or burden other people with personal misfortune. Nor does he or she want to risk the criticism or gossip that results when people get hold of intimate information about those to whom they do not owe the loyalty of intimate friendship.

Miss Manners does not want to discourage everyone from going around politely asking others how they are. She only suggests that people be gracious enough to accept the equally polite, "Fine, thank you, how are you?" as an answer.

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### REPORT FROM WEEK 96

in which you were asked to come up with a catch phrase to describe the 1990s. But first, a special citation to Mike Thring of Leesburg, who wins Dan Quayle's book, "Standing Firm," for coming up with catch phrases for the '50s through the '90s, which we print here without comment: '50s—The Dick Clark Years; '60s—The Dick York Years; '70s—The Dick Nixon Years; '80s—The Richard Simmons Years; '90s—The Age of Bobbitt.

- Back to the '90s:
- ◆ Third Runner-Up: **The Great Sobriety** (Joseph Atkins, Bethesda)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up: **How's My Decade?** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- ◆ First Runner-Up: **The Times That Sold Men's Trials** (Kurt Rabin, Fredericksburg)
- ◆ **And the Winner of the framed Velvis: The Age of Innocence-Not Guilty** (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- ◆ Honorable Mentions:
- The Honorable Mention Years.** (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- The Decade So Politically Correct It's Afraid to Label Itself** (Ken Krattenmaker, Landover Hills)
- The 1990s: The '80s With a Salary Cap.** (Robin D. Grove, Washington)
- The Decade of the Short Attention Spa** (Sue Lin Chong, Washington)
- The Self-Referential Decade, as Named by Peter Owen of Williamsburg.** (Peter Owen, Williamsburg)
- The Days of Whine & Roseanne** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)

## THE TABLOID TIMES

- The 21st Century: The Early Years** (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- The Nineties. The Ninesters, the Nine-o-ramas, the Ninety-Meisters, the Age of Nine-ishness...** (Paul Styrene, Olney)
- The Twilight of the Goods** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- A Decade to Be Named Later** (Joseph Romm, Washington)
- The Guilted Age** (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)
- The 1990s: NFC 10, AFC 0** (Dan Byrne, Falls Church)
- The Rough Age** (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)
- The Rolodecade** (Mike Thring, Leesburg)
- Rappin' With the '90s. The One 2 Ten Years Lacing Music With Our Fears \*%#@ the Rest 'Cause These Are Best.** (Jim and Tana Reagan, Herndon)
- The Decade of the 1990s—Brought to you by your good friends at Allstate, who remind you, "You're in Good Hands With Allstate," and by your local Coca-Cola bottler.** (Ken Krattenmaker, Landover Hills)
- The Decade Shortened by the Astronomers' Strike** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Next Week: **Newtonian Philosophy**

### ANN LANDERS

**DEAR ANN LANDERS:** You recently printed a letter from "C.B. in San Antonio," who wrote about the burden smokers place on society. You responded that if there were a drug that killed even a small percentage of the people killed by cigarettes it would be declared illegal.

There is such a drug. It is called alcohol. Yet we continue to glamorize drinking on TV, in films and in magazine ads.

We coddle the alcoholic and define alcoholism as a sickness. We are told to be sympathetic because the alcoholic has an addiction and needs help. There are many recovery centers available to alcoholics, but few exist for smokers, who are not portrayed as "sick" but as "undesirable."

Every grief that I have ever known in my life has been caused by alcohol. I was raised by an abusive, alcoholic father who smoked. How I would have loved it if all he did was smoke and not drink.

What about all the lives wrecked by alcohol? What about the financial burden alcohol-related illnesses add to the health care system? We have identified cigarettes as one of the major villains in the world today, but I know better. The greater villain is alcohol, and it usually starts with a bottle of beer.

Yours is a powerful voice, Ann Landers. Why don't you use it?—A Witness in Houston

**Dear Houston:** I cannot dispute a word you have written, and I have used my "powerful voice" repeatedly on this subject. Are you a new reader?

It would be just dandy with me if every bottle of beer and booze was dumped into the Atlantic Ocean. The world would be a safer place. Accidents and illnesses caused by

alcohol cost billions of dollars annually—not to mention the broken marriages and shattered careers. But we tried Prohibition in the '20s, and all it did was create bootleggers, make the Canadian liquor distributors richer and motivate folks to build stills in their back yards.

The sad fact is that a lot of people feel they need something to lift their spirits, release their inhibitions or drown their sorrows. For them, alcohol seems like the magic elixir, even though the "magic" is temporary—and often what follows is depression and despair.

I should tell you that I am, and always have been, a total abstainer. However, I respect the rights of others to decide what is best for them.

**DEAR ANN LANDERS:** Can you stand one more story about wind chimes? Back in 1930, at the dedication of the carillon in the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Indianapolis, an enraptured fellow on a park bench said to his neighbor, "Aren't those bells beautiful?"

The other answered, "Hey? What'd ya say?"

The fellow repeated, "I said, 'Aren't those bells beautiful?'"

The second responded, "I'm sorry, friend, I can't hear ya. Those darned bells is makin' too much noise."—Hood River, Ore.

**Gem of the Day:** William F. Buckley Jr. said, "I would rather entrust the government of the United States to the first 400 people listed in the Boston telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard University." (I should tell you that Buckley was a Yale man.)

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### Bridge

By Alfred Sheinwold and Frank Stewart

We like South's bidding. Once North suggested a minimum opening bid with balanced distribution, South knew where he wanted to play and wasted no time getting there.

In some deals, slow and careful investigation for slam works well; in others, it's better to leap. What direct auctions lose in accuracy, they regain by giving the defenders no information.

Alas, South shortchanged himself in the play. He won the first trump in his hand, unblocked the ace of hearts, and led a club to dummy's jack. East took the queen and returned the jack of spades: queen, king, ace.

South then took the king of hearts to discard his losing spade, ruffed a heart and ran the trumps. He'd have made his slam if the queen of hearts had dropped, or if West had begun with K-x of clubs, or if West had held the queen of hearts and the king of clubs (and succumbed to a squeeze). As it was, South was down one.

The one chance South didn't try was the one that would work. After taking the ace of spades, he should cash the ace of clubs. When the king doesn't fall, South throws a club, not a spade, on the king of hearts and ruffs a club high. When clubs break 3-3, South gets to dummy with the ten of trumps to take the 13th club.

If the clubs lie badly, South returns to dummy to ruff a heart. Since the seven of trumps is a dummy entry, South still succeeds if the queen of hearts falls in three leads.

Both sides vulnerable

NORTH (D)		EAST	
♦ A 4	♥ K J 5 3	♠ J 10 9 7 2	♣ Q 10 8 7
♦ 10 7 2	♥ A J 6 3	♠ 5	♣ Q 7 2

  

WEST		SOUTH	
♦ K 8 6 5	♥ 9 6 4 2	♠ Q 3	♥ A
♦ 9 8	♥ K 9 8	♦ A K Q J 6 4 3	♠ 10 5 4

The bidding:

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	2♦	Pass
2NT	Pass	6♦	All Pass

Opening lead: ♦ 9

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### Horoscope

By Sydney Omarr

**Aries** (March 21-April 19): Family member pitches in to help with household chores. You've been wanting to get something off your chest—do it, cycle high, puzzle pieces fall into place. Virgo involved.

**Taurus** (April 20-May 20): You'll be dancing to your own tune! Flowers, gifts received—and it isn't even your birthday. Surprise due, Libra and another Taurus involved.

**Gemini** (May 21-June 20): Escape from prison of preconceived notions! Permit psychic powers to flow freely. What others claim is impossible you will complete with flourish. Maintain aura of secrecy, glamour, mystery.

**Cancer** (June 21-July 22): You're chosen to be the leader—you've proved yourself! Focus on necessity for bringing order out of chaos, forming organization, getting people to pay their dues. Capricorn involved.

**Leo** (July 23-Aug. 22): Signals clear for travel! Focus on philosophy, interest in foreign lands, people, cuisine. Look beyond the immediate, you can plainly see tomorrow.

Two Aries persons play paramount roles.

**Virgo** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): Time to start something new! Individual who seeks creative investment can be your cup of tea. Accent independence, style, participation in pioneering project. Entertainment industry involved.

**Libra** (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Intuitive intellect shines forth—unorthodox family member confides, "Many times I wish I could be like everybody else!" Legal dispute involving property proves enriching. Winner!

**Scorpio** (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Try a different way! Focus on diversity, experimentation, transportation. Concern about relative's health is appreciated, perhaps more than you imagine. Sagittarian plays featured role.

**Sagittarius** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Obtain hint from Scorpio message. Get rid of superfluous material, begin anew, rebuild on solid structure. Aries moon highlights stirring of creative juices. You're in love!

**Capricorn** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Disseminate information, get thoughts on paper, record dreams. Your skill

as interpreter must now be applied to yourself. Aries relative involved. Haunting question answered.

**Aquarius** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Unorthodox relationship could cause whispers. Stand tall, speak your mind, let people know you don't intend to grovel. Short trip involved in connection with location of a document.

**Pisces** (Feb. 19-March 20): Individual who attempts to cloud issues will be exposed as charlatan. Define terms, protect reputation, refuse to compromise principles. Lost article located.

**If Feb. 5 is your birthday:** You have natural skill as writer, photographer, are drawn to current events, enjoy creative journalism. You are fond of flirting, you revel in clash of ideas, many of your friends are born under Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius. Your ideas are unorthodox, controversial, you challenge standard legal structures, you fight when cause is right and involves underdog. You'll be rid of burden in March, love and money highlighted for you in April.

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For a detailed horoscope from Sydney Omarr, phone 900-656-8488. The cost is \$1 a minute; average call lasts four minutes.

### Soaps on Call

The Washington Post provides daily updates of soap operas on Post-Haste, its free telephone information service. Call 202-334-9000 from a touch-tone phone and then enter the category code of the soap opera you want: All My Children (8201); Another World (8202); As the World Turns (8203); The Bold and the Beautiful (8204); Days of Our Lives (8205); General Hospital (8206); Guiding Light (8207); Loving (8208); One Life to Live (8209); The Young and the Restless (8211). For a directory of the codes, enter 8200.

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