

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 745: Hurry Up and Slow Down!

To make life go faster: Combine all acupuncture sessions into a single one, so you have 622 needles in you at the same time.

To make life go slower: Keep everything about NASCAR races the same except that the drivers now have to use little kids' pedal cars.

Don't you feel as if life is just speeding by in an incomprehensible blur? Well, not if you're at the DMV, as we'll learn below. Fifty-six-time Loser Bill Spencer of Baltimore suggests that we come up with solutions for a too-fast or too-slow world. This week: **Suggest particular ways that would slow life down, or ways that would speed it up**, as in Bill's examples above. You can suggest pairs of related entries, but it's not required.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets a bright red inflatable pop-up punching bag, sent as a promotion for the cable show "Bounty Girls." A blank-faced human is drawn on it, and there's a place to slide the photo of your choice over the blank face. Awww.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 31 (I mean, what else is there to do?). Put "Week 745" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Jan. 19. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Larry Yungk; this week's Honorable Mentions name is by Kevin Dopart.

REPORT FROM WEEK 741

In which we asked for "life lessons" that might be learned at any of four venues or situations we specified:

4 On the pot: It's only when you get to the end of the roll that you realize just how little toilet paper you really need. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

3 From watching a presidential campaign debate: You ask what life lessons can be derived from watching a presidential campaign debate? That's a very good question. As my father, who worked 37 years in a textile mill, once said... (Roy Ashley, Washington)

2 The winner of the Poo-Pooing (candy) Santa: From watching a presidential campaign debate: "No Interest Till 2008" isn't just for Big Marty's Mattress Warehouse anymore. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

On the pot: Floor tile installers must all be Nazis — why else would I keep seeing so many ways to form swastikas? (Fred Dawson, Beltsville)

LESS ON: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Lessons learned at the supermarket: Fruit-and-vegetable shoppers can be really rude, especially toward jugglers. (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

Never eat anything that has to have "food" in its name. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Avoid diet food at all costs: The people using that aisle all get HUGE. (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

Somebody must be buying the moldy brown celery, or else why would Safeway keep stocking it? (Brendan Beary)

"15 items or fewer" is a surprisingly fluid concept, totally dependent on whether they are your items or the items of the person in front of you. (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

If you use a 50-cent coupon for some overpriced, awful thing you never heard of, you save 50 cents! (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

When you get in the express line with too many items, it doesn't help much to explain that you have to hurry because you're illegally parked in a handicapped spot. (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)

The manager should know by now I don't think this is a "liberty or sumpin," yet every Saturday when I open The Post to this page, he'll come over and ask me. (Brendan Beary)

The less clothing the 17-year-old girl in front of you in line is wearing, the less likely it is that the 20-year-old male cashier is going to card her for those wine coolers. (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

If a recipe for that evening's dinner party calls for *n* ingredients, there will always be *n-1* in stock. (Jack Sheehan, Eden Prairie, Minn.)

At the DMV: There's no excuse for being rude, unless you are a seething caldron of bitterness and despair. (Martin Bancroft, Rochester, N.Y.)

DMV clerks have no sense of humor. You read Line 5 on the eye test chart as "U R A

P I G" and they won't even give you a second chance. (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

The people at the opera are less likely to pull a gun when you cut into line. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

The DMV single-handedly supports the Next Counter sign industry. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

A single bad-hair day can carry a five-year sentence. (Jay Shuck)

There are an infinite number of ways to pronounce foreigners' names, apparently none of them recognizable to the holders of those names. (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

From having the flu:

If you stay in bed in the fetal position for more than three days, the kids WILL learn how to pour their own bowl of cereal. (Anne Paris, Arlington)

Barbara Walters looks about 250 years old in high-definition. (Jeff Brechlin)

Kneeling in front of the toilet with the dry heaves is not unlike sitting in front of a computer trying to think of a joke about kneeling in front of the toilet with the dry heaves. (Brendan Beary)

You cannot actually fry an egg on somebody's forehead. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

Six degrees of separation is a lot when it's between 98.6 and 104.6. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

The human body can actually output more than it inputs. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Chicken soup looks the same going down and coming up. (Lawrence McGuire, Waldorf)

From watching a presidential campaign debate:

It's actually possible to make six guys in blue suits, all saying the same vacuous things for two straight hours, seem boring. (Russell Beland)

All the candidates must have remarkable ventriloquism skill, as they all appear to be talking out of their mouths. (Dan Ramish, Vienna)

If you can't say something nice about someone, compensate by saying bad stuff over and over. (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

A "question" is a brief interruption before the candidate continues saying what he had planned to say. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Nixon's starting to look pretty good. (Peter Metrinko)

On the pot:

There exists an almost metaphysical relationship between the toilet seat and the doorbell. (Bob Dalton)

You really do know all 50 states and their capitals. (Ed Gordon, Deerfield Beach, Fla.)

The guy in the next stall almost never wants to do knock-knock jokes. (Jeff Brechlin)

Having yellow-stained fungus-encrusted toenails doesn't make you a bad person. (Bob Dalton)

The worst bars have the best graffiti. (Tom Witte)

Only loose shoes are overrated. (Kevin Dopart)

There's at least one person out there willing to let my phone ring 27 times. (Russell Beland)

Another smell you can't cover up in a public stall is permanent Magic Marker. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

On vacation here, I've discovered I don't know squat. (Larry Yungk, up-country Thailand)

And Last: From watching a presidential campaign debate on the pot due to having the flu: **This may be hell — but at least I'm not at the DMV.** (Russ Taylor)

Next Week: Clue Us In, or Puzzled Expressions



What goes up... doesn't always stay there, as politicians often learn. Clockwise from top left: Howard Dean seemed to have momentum, but didn't, in '04; Mike Huckabee calls his "extraordinary"; John McCain and Hillary Clinton aren't shy about claiming it; John Kerry had enough to win the Democratic nomination, but couldn't ride the wave to shore; and Ron Paul, who trails in the polls, insists the mo is with him.

Got Their 'Mo'-Jo Working? They Hope So.

MOMENTUM, From C1

Question: What exactly is momentum? To judge from pundits and political coverage, it is somewhat like a "bounce," only longer-lasting. It has been referred to as a "wave" that candidates are "padding" and also as something one can smell. It is inscrutable. Sometimes, for reasons known and unknown, momentum may "peak" too soon. *Oooh... He lost his momentum.* People say it as if fickle gods have intervened.

The term momentum is like Silly Putty for political consultants, stretchable to fit any meaning. It is based on polls and fundraising and coverage and other things measurable, for sure, but it is also a feeling, which means it's like "buzz" — completely real, unless it isn't.

"I think that there's such a thing as faux mo," says Jane Hall, an American University professor who studies the media and politics. Hall says faux mo can sometimes be explained by "groupthink" — all the same political insiders talking to one another, reinforcing the message that a certain candidate did bet-

ter than "expected." (Than who expected? Than everyone expected!)

Howard Dean had momentum once. As did George H.W. Bush in 1980 ("big mo"), and Joe Lieberman in 2004 (Joe-mentum).

To be sure, not all mo is faux mo. Folks like a winner. Folks trust other folks. As the primary season advances, voters' tastes may coalesce around a candidate, and that candidate may begin to paddle a "wave," if you will. But in December 2007? Judging momentum before a single vote has been cast is a little like reviewing a book before it's been written.

Part of the rush to judge mo is a matter of story line. Humans are inclined to look for patterns in disorder. When we tell stories, we focus on the arc.

Hall, a former Los Angeles Times reporter, says a colleague once put it this way: If a candidate is doing well and his campaign plane gets a flat tire, that's a flat tire. But if the candidate is doing badly when his plane gets a flat, why, that's highly symbolic. It's yet more confirmation that the candidate has lost the mo.

In science, momentum is the product of mass and

velocity. It is a way of measuring the impetus of an object. In politics — at least at this point in the campaign cycle, before the Iowa caucuses — momentum measures potential energy. It measures hope.

"It means optimism," says Dennis Johnson, a former campaign consultant who teaches political management at George Washington University. "Things seem to be going better."

Seeming is great, but seeming isn't voting. Science tells us there might be such a thing as perpetual motion were it not for pesky details like gravity or friction. Politics also has outside forces acting on it, so world events and campaign ads and push-polling and a rival's debate performance can all slow a candidate's journey — just how much and why are unresolved questions. There are no control groups in politics, and no placebos, either. No sure-fire way to test a theory.

"Inevitability can drive momentum," says Richard Semiatin, who teaches political science at American University. If only we could put such things in test tubes.

Marion Meadows, Warming to the Task

If smooth jazz fans turn up at Blues Alley this weekend expecting saxophonist Marion Meadows to take the chill out of winter, they won't go home disappointed.

Fronting a quintet at the Georgetown club Thursday night, the reedman pulled off that trick with a sun-splashed, Afro-Cuban-accented arrangement of "South Beach." It was among several tunes, old and new, that sounded as if it were composed with an endless summer jazz festival in mind, the spotlight shifting back and forth between Meadows's fluid performances on soprano or tenor sax.

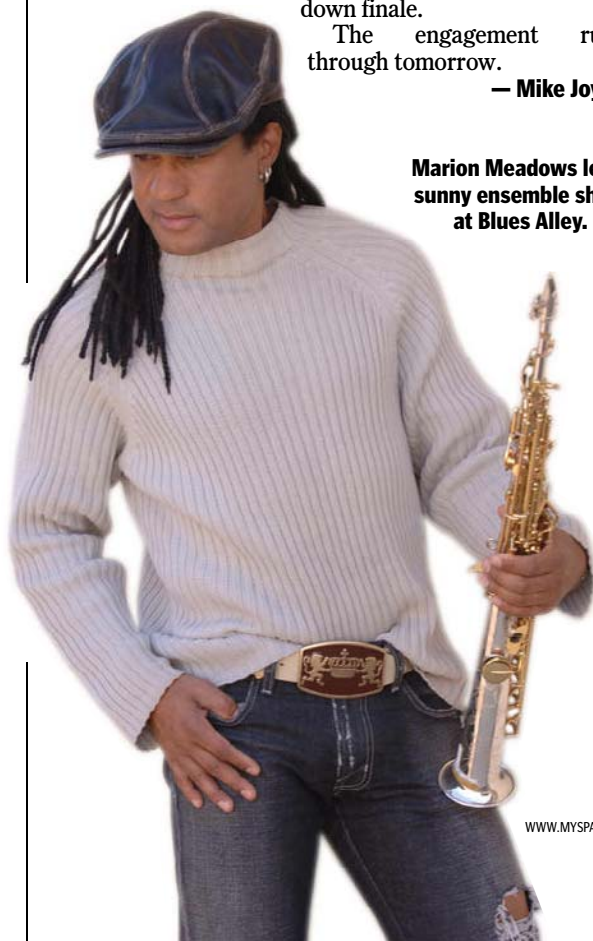
But as long as Meadows is touring with guitarist Perry Hughes and keyboardist-vocalist Will Brock, his concerts will also appeal, at least intermittently, to listeners drawn to mainstream jazz and soul music. Hughes, a sorely underrated Detroit-bred veteran, is wonderfully adept at evoking Wes Montgomery's thumb-powered dynamics. Like his buddy George Benson, Hughes enjoys lacing his solos with Montgomery-inspired octave runs that generate bright tones and increasingly swift momentum, so much so that at one point he sounded as if he were back in Detroit, playing a small combo gig after hours.

Brock, on the other hand, is young, gifted and charismatic. Besides drawing on straight-ahead jazz chromaticism, Latin rhythm vamps and gospel chords, he performed two songs that revealed his affection for the music (and showmanship) of Al Green, among other soul greats. Bass guitarist Chip Shearin and drummer Jabari, also generously showcased, made for a potent combination during a funk throw-down finale.

The engagement runs through tomorrow.

— Mike Joyce

Marion Meadows led a sunny ensemble show at Blues Alley.



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