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Week 1023: T minus 5-7-5 — Haiku for Mars (Invite-style)

By [Pat Myers](#), Published: May 23

We are smart and dumb.
We invent cellphones, then drop
Them in the toilet.

In an effort to keep us interested in a program that no longer has a moon-mission program or even any rockets to send astronauts into space, NASA has invited the public to send a poem to Mars. The agency plans to send up a DVD containing three [contest-winning haiku](#) on the new MAVEN spacecraft that's scheduled to head for the Martian atmosphere in November (not sure if the Little Green Folks have Blu-Ray yet). And we figured that we wouldn't be stepping on NASA's moon boots if we hitched a ride on this contest, since you *know* that what we'll pick doesn't have a chance in the universe of being sent into space.

This week: Write one or more humorous haiku that will greet the Martians or share a little nugget of what life is like on Earth, as in the example above by Pulitzer Prize-winning Toilet Haiku Poet Gene Weingarten. NASA totally omits mention of what it means by haiku, but we will use the broadest possible definition, sure to infuriate the poetry-lovers who are already seething at the very phrase "humorous haiku": Five syllables on the first line. Seven syllables on the second line. Five syllables on the third line. Breaking a word over two lines doesn't tend to be very clever.

Winner gets the [Inkin' Memorial](#), the Lincoln-statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a greenish bottle in the shape of a man's torso (he is wearing a glass Speedo) that is filled with a swirl of green and white sand. You know, because. We're pretty sure that this fine sculpture was made on Mars, but it was donated by Loser Nan Reiner, who lives on Earth, or at least Alexandria.

Other runners-up win their choice of a yearned-for [Loser Mug](#) or the ardently desired [Grossery Bag](#). Honorable mentions get a lusted-after [Loser magnet](#). First Offenders receive a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (FirStink for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, June 3; results published June 23 (online June 20). No more than 25 entries per entrant per week. Include "Week 1023" in your e-mail subject line or it might be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/inviterules. The subhead for this week's honorable mentions is by Tom Witte; the alternative headline in the "next week's results" line was suggested by both Tom Witte and Stephen Dudzik. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev.

Report from Week 1019

in which we asked for ideas for what to do during Screen-Free Week, in which people were encouraged to put away their electronic devices — ones with screens, anyway. Remarkably, the Empress received only one entry via snail mail, from Dave Prevar of Annapolis. No ink for Dave, because the E couldn't figure out how



to open an envelope.

The winner of the Inkin' Memorial

Turn your head sideways and smile to show people when you're joking. (*Art Grinath, Takoma Park, Md.*)

2. Winner of the edible six-inch gummi rat: Invent a non-electronic version of Words With Friends that you can play with your family. (*Josh Feldeblyum, Philadelphia*)

3. Instead of the kids playing Angry Birds on the iPad, have Grandpa teach them how to shoot real birds with a BB gun like he did when he was their age. (*Keith Waites, Frederick, Md.*)

4. Actually laugh out loud. (*Andy Bassett, New Plymouth, New Zealand; Art Grinath*)

Electronix: honorable mentions

Get a Sharpie and collaboratively edit and update the encyclopedia at your local library. (*Kevin Dopart, Washington*)

Take turns calling up people you barely know and tell them what you had for breakfast. (*Neal Starkman, Seattle*)

Call it "The Hunger Game": Give the kids a corded phone and the number to the local pizza place. First one to figure out what a phone jack is gets to eat. (*Danielle Nowlin, Woodbridge, Va.*)

Buy enough copies of your local newspaper that you can cut out and send that one interesting article to all your friends. (*Josh Feldeblyum*)

Catch four robins, then set up a slingshot just outside a pig farm. (*Ras-I Ehl, Bear, Del.*)

Family members can quiz one another about which number corresponds to a specific Verizon channel. The winner chooses the first show to view as soon as the week is over. (*Larry Carnahan, Arlington, Va.*)

Compulsively check your slide rule every five minutes during meetings. (*Kevin Dopart*)

Spend a week bantering with the family, as everyone, even the littlest kid, fires off impossibly witty, culturally allusive repartee that sounds if it were written by Ivy League-educated twenty-somethings. It'll be just like TV! (*Rob Huffman, Fredericksburg, Va.*)

When you can't remember where you've seen that actor before, fly to Hollywood and ask around. (*Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.*)

Remove the innards from an old electronic device you stopped using this week, disassemble and sort the software inside, and string the 0's into a lovely necklace. (*Dick Barnes, Washington*)

Instead of texting your wife, string two cans together and talk. After all, she's only in the next room. (*William Joyner, Chapel Hill, N.C., whose only other Invite ink came 12 years ago*)

Encourage your kids to go outside by reminding them that there are lots of places other than the Internet to get misinformation about sex. (*Kevin Dopart*)

If you get lost while driving, there's no need for GPS: Just follow the first pizza delivery car you see back to Domino's. You'll still be lost, but hey, pizza! (*Susan Gearity, Menifee, Calif.*)

Rediscover the charm of the written word. Like my charming collection of '80s Penthouse Forums. (*Ward Kay, Vienna, Va.*)

Ladies, all you need to rekindle (ha ha, just a little Screen-Free Week humor) your marriage is a high stool!

Position the stool directly in front of the darkened big-screen TV hanging on hubby's man-cave wall — he will be staring at this spot already, with a dazed expression. He'll note the movement in his field of vision and see you, although a reintroduction may be necessary. ("ESPN has middle-aged women reporters now?") (*Rob Huffman*)

Collect dust from the bookshelves, board games and LP racks and make custom stuffed animals. (*Stephen Dudzik, Olney, Md.*)

Buy a price-sticker gun and a roll of stickers. Draw "thumbs up" icons on the stickers. Go around the neighborhood and "like" things. (*Gary Crockett*)

Practice driving without talking on a cellphone: Feel the novel sensation of traveling faster than half the posted speed limit, while staying between the lines! (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village, Md.*)

Well, today we have soccer practice, hockey practice, language tutoring, SAT prep class, science fair project, fill out Sidwell Friends kindergarten application (*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

Instead of relying on your smartphone to calculate an 18 percent tip, simply take the pre-tax total and divide by 5.55556 in your head. (*Trevor Kerr, Chesapeake, Va.*)

Finally make that scrapbook of all your family photos: Tape your camera memory card to a sheet of decorative paper. (*Danielle Nowlin*)

Try experiencing Third World screen-free challenges, like malaria. (*Kevin Dopart*)

And Last: Mail a letter to your son in Chantilly asking him to FedEx you the Style Invitational contest. When it arrives, compose a few entries on the 1956 Royal Magic Margin typewriter you got for high school graduation in 1961 and kept all these years even though your wife begged you to sell it on eBay. Take your document to Kinko's and fax it to 202-334-4312. Three weeks later, when it's no longer Screen-Free Week, you can check at washingtonpost.com/styleinvitational to learn that, once again, you're inkless. (*the almost never inkless Chris Doyle, Kihei, Hawaii*)

Still running — deadline Monday night — is our contest to compare or contrast any two items from our wacky list. See bit.ly/invite1022.

See the Empress's online column [The Style Conversational](#) (posted late Thursday afternoon), in which she discusses today's new contest and results along with news about the Loser Community — and you can vote for your favorite among the inking entries, since you no doubt figured the Empress chose the wrong winner. If you'd like an e-mail notification each week when the Invitational and Conversational are posted online, write to the Empress at losers@washpost.com (note that in the subject line) and she'll add you to the mailing list. And on Facebook, join the far more lively group [Style Invitational Devotees](#) and chime in.

Next week's results: Colt Following, or And . . . They're Offspring! [our eighth annual "grandfoals" contest in which you got to breed any two of the winning and Losing foals "bred" four weeks earlier from a list of Triple Crown-eligible horses.](#)

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