

The Style Invitational

Week 505: The Rule of Dumb



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Erect a thirty-foot statue to hernia victims.

Rent an entire floor of Trump Plaza for one year and give it to someone who raises free-range chickens.

Just donate the money to Bill Gates.

This week's contest: You are given \$1 million, under the following conditions: (1) You must spend it all. (2) You must use it in a way that neither directly nor indirectly works to your financial benefit. (3) You may not use it to alleviate the suffering of anyone on Earth, or for any other public-spirited project other than . . . (4) the joy of stupidity. First-prize winner gets a vintage, limited-edition, numbered Franklin Mint collectible portrait plate of John F. Kennedy, rendered really, really badly. First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable

mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted. Deadline is Monday, May 19. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be 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 in four weeks. 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 W.J. Johnson of Arlington.

Report from Week 501,

in which we asked you to take any line from anywhere in that day's newspaper, and make it the answer to a question.

◆ Third Runner-Up:

A: Just before cooking, pull off their beards.

Q: What's a way to really tick off missionaries?
(Jeff Brown, Fairfax; Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

◆ Second Runner-Up:

A: Some look insectile, too, perhaps because their surfaces suggest exoskeletons.

Q: Is it just me, or do runway models look a tad skinny?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ First Runner-Up:

A: Patricia Tamlin was working the night shift at Scarborough Hospital in Toronto when she started feeling hot.

Q: What line starting a story in The Washington Post could also start a story in Penthouse?

(April M. Musser, Arlington)

◆ And the winner of the stupid "Simpsons"-theme board game:

A: We were in the Guggenheim for almost three hours and had absolutely no idea what the heck was going on.

Q: What would you hate to overhear one doctor say to another as they leave the operating room after brain surgery on your wife?
(Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)

◆ Honorable Mentions:

A: It's a blasphemy wrapped in an atrocity.

Q: Have you tried our new kosher cheesesteak on Wonder Bread?
(David Kleeman, Chicago)

A: In a seminal study with other scholars of post-conflict recoveries on three continents, Boyce warned that "predation by the powerful—too often tolerated, if not encouraged, by donors in the name of political expediency—corrodes the long-run prospects for a lasting peace" by preserving centralized economies and unresponsive governance.

Q: Can you give an example of how The Post has altered its writing style to attract young readers?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: "If tests from our experts confirm this, this could be the smoking gun."

Q: What did Hans Blix say upon picking up a smoking gun?
(Milo Sauer, Fairfax)

A: "He knocked out his teeth and gave me one as a souvenir."

Q: Miss Foster, how did John Hinckley celebrate your birthday this year?
(Fred Dawson, Beltsville)

A: I would show *this* to children.

Q: What deposition statement by Michael Jackson compelled his lawyers to quickly settle the civil suit against him?

(Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

A: Use a long leash.

Q: What's good advice for walking a flutulent St. Bernard?
(Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

A: Help them create a BBC of their own.

Q: How could we get the new Iraqi leadership to commit the world's first genocide by boredom?
(Kenneth S. Gallant, Little Rock)

A: We want one, too.

Q: What was the semi-official slogan of the feminist movement?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: The crossword puzzle did not appear in some April 12 editions.

Q: To what do psychologists attribute the recent spike in suicide rates among nerds?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: It was World War II.

Q: Was there anything Cher thought more newsworthy than her farewell concert?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: "We believed Saddam Hussein and his henchpersons had smallpox."

Q: Can you give an example of the use of a gender-neutral term even more ridiculous than "chairpersons"?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: It's like deja vu.

Q: What is deja vu like?
(Chuck Smith, Woodbridge; Mike Hammer, Arlington)

A: There is cholera, with its uncontrollable diarrhea.

Q: Is there anything worse than a Celine Dion special?
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

A: Tens of thousands of people celebrated in Leipzig after seeing their city's name flashed on a giant screen.

Q: How can one tell that the people of Leipzig need to get out more often?
(Marc Leibert, New York; Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: I think of my grandmother when I see people fretting about the daily gyrations of the stock market.

Q: How do you use the words "grandmother" and "gyrations" in a sentence without bringing up some unfortunate mental images?
(Ellen Black, Centreville)

A: Timber-castles-dot-England, during the Middle Ages.

Q: What is the worst example of an e-business that failed because it was too ahead of its time?
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

A: An orangutan navigates a boat; a horse reads pictures; a rat lays cable; a hand-fed fish.

Q: Aside from "when pigs fly," what else will have to happen before Hootie Johnson admits he was wrong?
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

A: Here are seven spots that fit the Bill.

Q: What was the forensic finding on Monica's dress?
(Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

A: I coolly asked them to take out their textbooks.

Q: How did Tom Swiftly begin his lecture on the Ice Age?
(Danny Bravman, Potomac)

A: Oh, if it were only that simple.

Q: So, which supermodel do you plan to have sex with?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: This year, a group of semi-professional puppeteers are bringing "Hansel und Gretel" to the tiny building, built in Philly in 1876.

Q: What is it that you're sure I won't mind missing the Super Bowl for?
(Russell Beland, Springfield)

A: It doesn't matter.

Q: What do the French think?
(Brad Suter, Charlottesville)

A: He wouldn't wear his name tag.

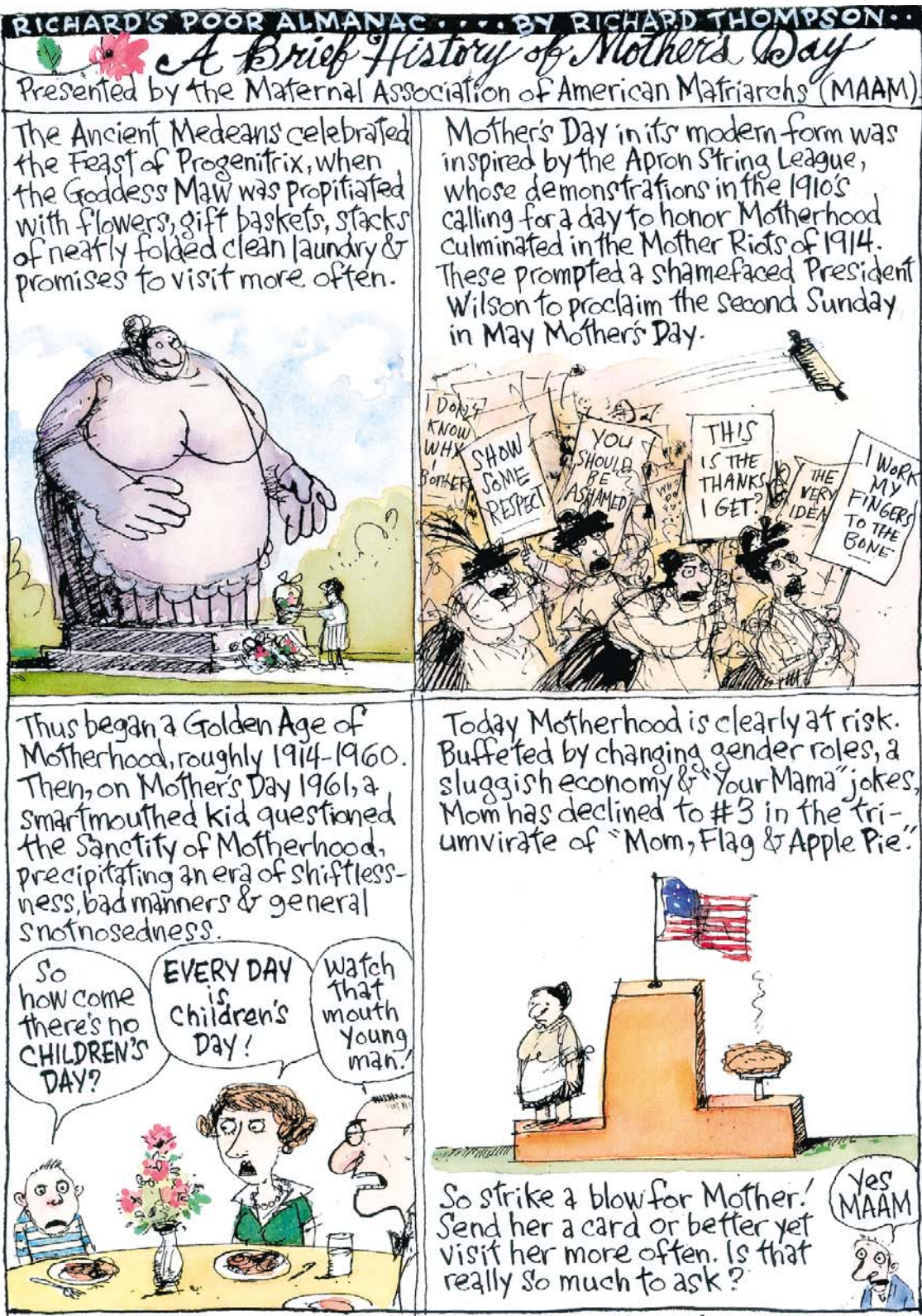
Q: How was Osama able to slip unnoticed out of Afghanistan?
(Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

A: "Our castle is in the mall."

Q: What is the slogan of Jewish American Princesses?
(Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

A: "Oh, Steve, we called your name hours ago."

Q: What is the last thing I want to hear at the MVA?
(Stephen Dudzik, Olney)



MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

The Battle of All Mothers

"Because I'm your mother and I say so, that's why."

As an explanation to settle domestic disputes, this has always struck Miss Manners as reasonable. Well, perhaps not always. It takes a certain amount of maturity to realize the value of a certain amount of maturity.

She would hate to think that a lack of this hard-earned quality is why so few mothers now use that triumphant argument on their children. Even if they insist on claiming that they are hardly old enough to possess said quality.

The traditional counterargument to the traditional maternal assertion of divine right was that Mother couldn't make the correct judgment because she was of a different era and out of step with the way things were done in the modern world.

"You better believe it," was her rejoinder.

But there are mothers loose in the world today who would rather be young than right. That this choice is not available to them does not seem to register. So you see why Miss Manners worries.

The argument that now prevails over maternal authority, that the world is ever changing, has always been true. It is also true that the young hear about certain social changes first, sometimes generations before the changes become generally accepted.

This is interesting information, if not wishful thinking, and the parent who listens will be entertained, if not enlightened. Nevertheless, it is raw material in need of being run through the perspective of wisdom and experience. Not all change is for the better, and high selectivity is required about what a sensible person should adopt.

Mothers who believe that they have no special advantage over their minor children in accomplishing this may, unfortunately, be right. Or they may only be unable to come up with the proper facial expression to accompany authority after their botox injections.

Miss Manners does not truly believe that these are the only reasons that mothers—and fathers, too, for that matter—are more apt to discount

their own judgment than they used to be. Many are modest about their own discernment, distrustful of anything smacking of authoritarianism, and acting in the belief that they are fostering the development of the child's independence.

Draconian though she admittedly is, Miss Manners does not really believe that parents should refuse to listen to dissent or to yield when they have been convinced. But she is seriously worried about the pride with which many declare themselves "nonjudgmental" and the ease with which they accept the idea that their children know what is best for themselves.

Everyone does judge the world, of course, and many parents struggle valiantly to improve it for the benefit of their children. But deploring bad influences—television, corporate morality, the personal behavior of athletes and politicians and such—is not enough. It must be accompanied by confidence that one does not have to succumb to such influences. The opinionated parent offers a confident alternative to peer and cultural pressure.

And even if the child disagrees with every fiber of his being and never grows up to change his mind, she has given him something to work with—or against. Miss Manners has never understood how the non-judgmentalists expect their children to develop judgment without having observed the process.

Dear Miss Manners:

How do you deal with people who invite themselves?

By apologizing profusely for being unable to let them in.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

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

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♦	2 ♠
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Dbl All Pass			
Opening lead: ♠ 2			

A player brought me today's deal. He'd had a tough competitive decision as South and was second-guessing himself mercilessly.

"What should I do over four spades?" he asked. "When North passed, he said he was willing for me to bid five hearts, but I'd already bid three hearts freely, and I had no help for his diamonds."

"How'd you do against four spades doubled?" I hedged.

"Down two," he said, "for plus 500 points, but five hearts, making, would produce plus 650."

I studied the deal for a long time. "Five hearts might fail," I said.

"Say you ruff the second spade and draw trumps. If you then try two diamond finesses, you go down. If instead you draw only two trumps and then test the clubs, East ruffs the third club and gets a diamond

later. Nor is there a squeeze. You shouldn't regret doubling four spades."

My friend nodded and went away. I didn't tell him that after the second trick, five hearts is cold. South cashes the ace of hearts and leads a diamond to the jack and queen. If East returns a trump, South wins in dummy, ruffs a spade, takes the ace of diamonds and ruffs a diamond. He goes to the queen of clubs, ruffs a diamond, returns a club to the king, draws trumps and wins the 13th trick with the ace of clubs.

Should South bid five hearts? South should have asked West, not me. If West leads anything other than a spade at Trick Two, South lacks the entries for the dummy reversal and probably loses three tricks.

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Next Week: Really Staked