

The Style Invitational

Week 509: Be a Real Card



In the bank of truth
You've made a deposit
Congrats on coming
Out of the closet.

Excessive kids make a guy
Look like heck to me—
Please accept my best wishes
On getting your vasectomy.

This week's contest was proposed by Bird Waring of New York. Bird suggests this flight of fancy: Come up with a greeting card rhyme for an un-greeting-card occasion like the ones above. First prize was donated to The Style Invitational by Stephen Dudzik of Olney. It is a fabulous matched set of thong panties and T-shirt, each featuring the likeness of the erstwhile Iraqi minister of information and his signature line, "My feeling, as usual we will slaughter them all."

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, June 16. 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 Sara Ulyanova of San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

- Report from Week 505**, in which you had to come up with novel ways to spend \$1 million that would confer no benefit on anyone, except for the joy of stupidity:
- ◆ Third Runner-Up: **Spend half to create a better mousetrap and the other half to genetically engineer a craftier mouse.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)
 - ◆ Second Runner-Up: **Give every single American taxpayer a half-cent refund!** (G.W. Bush, Washington) (Joe Cackler, Falls Church)
 - ◆ First Runner-Up: **Hire O.J. to find the real weapons of mass destruction.** (Charles Star, New York)
 - ◆ And the winner of the especially badly rendered JFK commemorative plate: **Purchase 14.28 seconds' worth of commercial time during the Super Bowl and read a list of the 10 people to whom you would have given \$100,000 each, had you not blown the money on the commercial.** (Mark Briscoe, Arlington)

- ◆ Honorable Mentions: **Purchase the largest ball of twine, located in Cawker City, Kan., and hire Lily Chin, the world's fastest crocheter, to produce a cozy for the world's largest teapot, located just outside Chester, W.Va.** (Mark Briscoe, Arlington)

Extend the Orange Line toward Dulles 13 more feet. (Russell Beland, Springfield)
Add Al Sharpton to Mount Rushmore. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

Give it to Mrs. Sese Seko, to tide her over until she can get all her money out of that Swiss bank. (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)

Spend it all on books advising you how to invest your money. (Sarah Abernathy, Arlington)

File a class-action suit against myself, settle out of court, and pay a \$1 million fine to the government without admitting wrongdoing. (Katherine Walkden, New York)

Build the Tomb of the Unknown Politician. (Barry Blyveis, Columbia; Richard Lempert, Arlington)

Fund a scientific study, including extensive market research, to find out the best thing to do if someone gives you \$1 million. (Betsy Pankey, Falls Church; Dave Edelschick, Manassas)

Play enough skee-ball to finally win that giant stuffed llama. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Buy one of those Honus Wagner baseball cards and use it to light a cheap cigar. (Paul Kondis, Alexandria)

Pay Woody Harrelson \$1 million for permission to sleep with Demi Moore. (Bill McDonald, Alexandria)

Sink it into R&D for a penis-reducing cream. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

For its immense symbolic value, transport one of those Saddam statues from Iraq to the inside of a maximum-security cell at Marion Federal Penitentiary. (Barry Blyveis, Columbia)

Arrange, when the sad time comes, for a new pair of shoes to be placed daily on the grave of Imelda Marcos. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Buy all your neighbors' extra zucchini. (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)

Fund the cast of "Happy Days" in a production of "The Marriage of Figaro." (Kevin Cuddihy, Fairfax)

Set up a booth at a job fair and hire people to set up booths at job fairs . . . until the money runs out. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Create the world's first Reverse Pyramid Scheme by sending the million dollars to one friend and telling him to send \$100,000 to ten other friends, instructing THEM to send \$10,000 to ten other friends, and so on, until a million people each get one dollar. (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Spend it on a lobbying campaign to change the name of the yucca plant to something nicer. (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)

Spend it on a grass-roots lobbying campaign to change the name of the Washington Capitals to the Washington Capitols. (Ted Frank, Arlington)

Fund a commission to study ways to improve alphabetical order. (Put all the vowels together, move B and D farther apart to avoid confusion, etc.) (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)

Pay for the naming rights to the Wilson Bridge, and name it "That There Bridge" (Peter Ostrader, Rockville)

Buy 529,100 16-pound bags of ice. At \$1.89 a bag, that would amount to \$999,999, leaving a dollar tip for the kid who brings it out to my car. (Jay King, Rockville)

Undercoat every Gremlin still on the road. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Help one of the nation's troubled airlines stay in business another 20 minutes or so. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

How about 14,000 stars all officially renamed "Debbie." (Russell Beland, Springfield)

◆ **And Last: I'd use the million bucks to do whatever it says in the winning entry. (Jayson Blair, New York)** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Next Week: Whatsa Motto You?



MISS MANNERS

Rule of Dumb

Dumb, dumbstruck, dumbfounded: Miss Manners is wearying of the cycle. A dumb remark is made. The person to whom it is said is dumbstruck. Miss Manners is dumbfounded at how often this keeps happening.

She isn't even counting remarks that are made with vicious intent, or questions that are asked to pry into other people's business. Those have their own, worse categories of rudeness.

Genuinely dumb remarks are those that sound insulting, even though no ill will went into them, or sound nosy, even though no real curiosity prompted them. They are uttered just because the speaker felt inclined to say something and never thought to analyze how it might strike the target.

The most popular dumb remark now seems to be "You look tired," beating out the "Smile!" command, which had a long run.

This replacement is at least more likely to produce results. Telling someone he or she looks tired has the effect of making the person look even more tired, the original state being compounded by the wearying knowledge that one's dragginess is so obvious. But then, instructions to cheer up generally produced the same effect.

The appearance of other people, almost always a dangerous subject for commentary (the exception being when someone you love gets dressed up and it becomes dangerous not to comment), is a major inspiration for dumb remarks. To point out to others that they are short, tall, fat, thin, pregnant, using a wheelchair, looking anxious or blushing is not as informative as many people imagine, and to inquire why is not likely to enlighten or amuse even the one who asks.

When it comes to unsolicited suggestions for improving the appearance and such, the merely thoughtless are often confused with proselytizers, who are as purposeful as they are rude. But instead of recommending therapists and handing out exercise plans, the former just deliver offhand remarks, such as "You could stand a haircut," "That's a terrible neighborhood you live in," "You should get married," "Are you still in that same job?" or a simple "Yuck!" at the sight of what someone else is eating.

Birth, marriage, divorce and death seem to move practically everyone to astonishing dumbness. No one really cares if prospective parents want a boy or a girl, but people keep asking them. This is about as useful as asking engaged couples if they know what they are doing, and about as suitable to casual conversation as asking divorcing couples what went

wrong. When there is a death, people don't ask the bereaved if they are pleased; they tell them they should be: "It's better this way."

Commenting on children who are present, guessing and asking about people's ancestral origins and assessing people's possessions are other rich sources of dumb remarks. Miss Manners is regularly besieged by the victims, who beg or suggest a response in case it happens again. Something witty and withering, they specify. A put-down.

But while Miss Manners has nothing against wit, she refuses to resort to using rudeness against the rude, and certainly not against those who parrot thoughtless remarks without intention to hurt.

Fortunately, she has also found that the most effective reaction to dumb remarks is dumbfoundedness. Looking at them wide-eyed and saying nothing has the simple charm of leaving the dumb remark echoing in the air for everyone to hear how dumb it was. Sometimes even the person who said it.

Dear Miss Manners:

Several members of my working group at the office have adopted the custom of bringing back small remembrances for the other members of the group when they go on vacation. How long should I display these items in my office? I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but mine is a small cubicle, and it's getting rather cluttered.

Next, do I need to reciprocate? Unlike my colleagues, who are mostly unmarried, without children and take exotic trips, I am a young mother, and most of my vacation time is spent doing exciting things like going to see my in-laws. Darling little souvenirs of these trips (postcards of the nearby flood-control channel, perhaps?) are in rather short supply.

Bring them your mother-in-law's cookies or, if she doesn't bake, ones that you bought for the children before they got carsick. Miss Manners assures you that your colleagues will be just as happy not to have yet another decoration for their cubicles, even though these can be gracefully jettisoned with the words "How darling—I'm going to take this home."

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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TODAY'S HOROSCOPE Jeraldine Saunders

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): A long-standing domestic issue calls for an infusion of fresh life. Make the best effort you can. Trust your dreams to give some pointers. Your wit and wisdom sparkle and amuse.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Past grudges should be forgiven and well and truly buried. Now is an excellent moment for laying groundwork for something new. Your patience threshold is higher than usual.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): It's a good time to clear the air and talk through long-standing niggling problems affecting personal or professional relationships. If possible, stay home

and surround yourself with life's luxuries.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): It's a time for giving free rein to your emotions; tell someone how much you love them. Your tact and diplomatic skills make a great impression. Capricorn plays a fascinating role.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Fear not the unknown. Play your deck face-up. Not hiding things will be to your advantage. A relationship may turn out to be too hot to handle.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): The spotlight is on the home. Your marriage status dominates. A financial matter

should not be of concern as you are easily outmaneuvering your opponents. Virgo plays a role.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): You need spoiling and pampering. Housing and lifestyle are under review. Partners offer an interesting proposal. You hold the trump card.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): You're making news. You wanted responsibility and now you have it — duty accompanied by pressure! A relationship gets too hot not to cool down. Cancer native involved.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Stay true to your ideals. Children and dependents

want your all. A financial matter is sorted out to your satisfaction. Late nights, good food and drink are too much of a good thing.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Unexpected surprises are in store. Your talents are recognized, your previous generosity is returned. Marriage and relationships could benefit from a little more tender loving care.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Someone you love tries to take advantage. Your manipulative behavior toward unsuspected loved ones has unexpected results. This evening sees an amicable solution in a party atmosphere.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): You're getting on well with everyone, especially women. You have a *joie de vivre* you wish you felt more often. You're busy showering love and affection on those around you.

IF JUNE 8 IS YOUR BIRTHDAY: Your practical side excels at organizing and creating order out of chaos. You're an excellent referee and conciliator. You possess a mercurial temperament; this year you're clearing the decks and looking forward to reinventing yourself. September and October promise romance and personal gain. December marks a psychological turning point. H, Q and Z follow you around.
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