

The Style Invitational

Week 510: Universal Embarrassment



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This Week's Contest was suggested by Corey Hinderstein of Arlington. He thought of it while watching the Miss Universe Pageant. The final interview consisted of dippy softball questions submitted by the contestants themselves (True example: "Would you rather be fire or water?") Your challenge is to pretend that you are in a position to slip a bogus question into the stack that are going to be asked. What would you just love to see asked live, on national TV? Please remember, we can print only entries that are printable. Thank you. First-prize winner gets two products. The first is a promotional package containing revolutionary new fungus-defeating women's underpants by Hygeia. It fits hip size 36-38. The second is a can of Microwaveable Spotted Dick, an English-style dessert product from Heinz.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt, 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 23. 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 Chris Doyle of Forsyth, Mo.

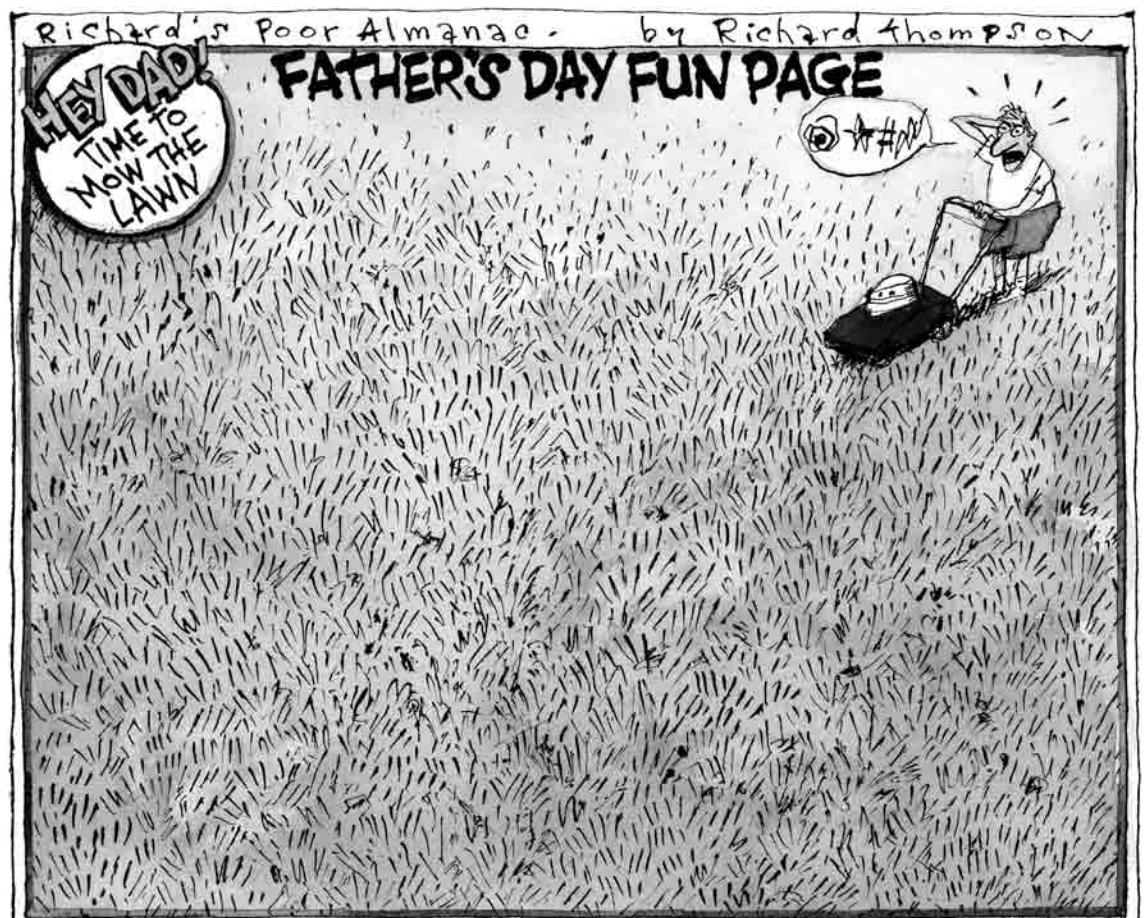
Report from Week 506, in which we asked you to create mottoes for federal agencies. Many, many people proposed that the Department of Defense adopt the motto "The Best Defense Is a Good Offense."

- ◆ Fourth Runner-Up: **U.S. Postal Service: When It Absolutely, Positively Has to Be There in About a Week or So.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.; Sanford Horn, Alexandria)
- ◆ Third Runner-Up: **Department of the Interior: Only YOU Can Prevent Forests.** (Joe Braverman, Silver Spring)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up: **Internal Revenue Service: Complete Worksheet A of Form 483 (b) to See if We Care.** (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)
- ◆ First Runner-Up: **Office of the Naval Inspector General: Yes, We've Heard It. No, We Don't Think It's Funny.** (Marc Leibert, New York)
- ◆ And the winner of the Stan Musial porcelain bobblehead doll: **1) Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service: We Offer Meaningful Conciliations, Unlike the Unreasonable Hammerheads at the National Mediation Board.**
2) National Mediation Board: We Specialize in Realistic Mediation, Unlike Those Meshugenehs at the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

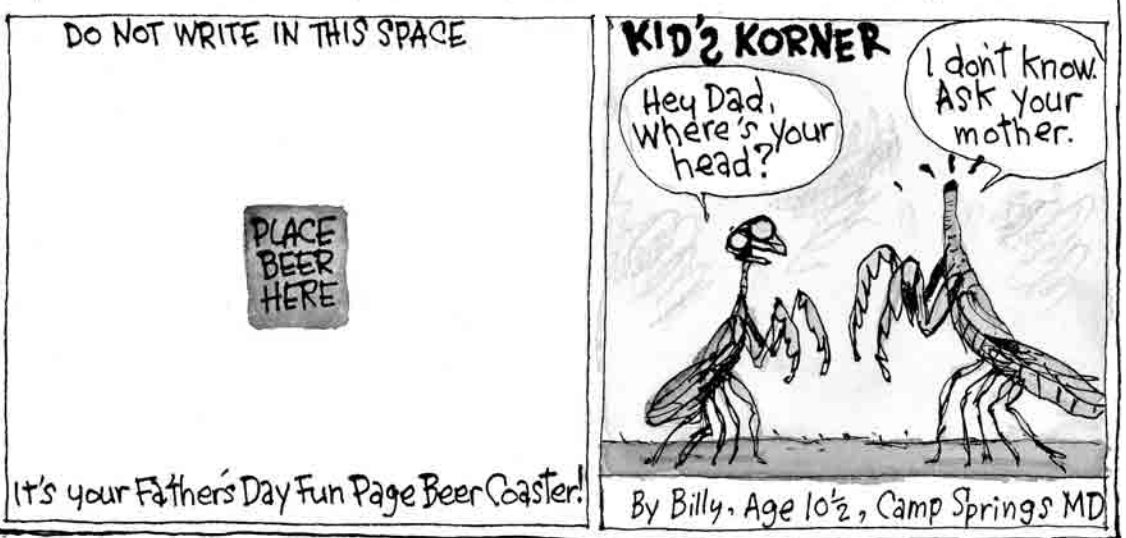
- ◆ Honorable Mentions:
 - Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds: How Do You Pin the Ocean to the Sand?** (Dana Howell, Dothan, Ala.)
 - The IRS: Shock and Audit.** (Elliott Schiff, Allentown, Pa.)
 - Legal Services Corp.: The Best Defense That \$19.95 Can Buy.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)
 - National Institute on Aging: Celebrating Our 39th Year!** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)
 - Immigration and Naturalization Service: Bringing You a Kinder and Gentler Xenophobia.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)
 - IRS: Why Is Taking Your Money a Service? It Just Is.** (Mike Genz, La Plata)
 - Environmental Protection Agency: Define 'Environment.'** (Michael Kane, Fort Collins, Colo.)
 - U.S. Secret Service: Only Five Out of Forty-Three Ain't Bad.** (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)
 - Department of the Interior: Do You Want Fires With That?** (Eric Gallagher, Frederick)
 - Patent and Trademark Office: Send Us Your Idea for a Slogan.** (Jim Wilson, Arlington)
 - Department of Defense: The Big Stick.** (Robert Carlisle, Arlington; Judith Cottrill, New York)
 - Department of the Interior: Oddly, All Our Stuff Is Outdoors.** (Julie Brinkman, Frederick)
 - NSA: Actually, the Helicopters Are More of a Navy Blue.** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)
 - Department of Education: Give Me a Teacher, and I Learn for a Day. Teach Me to Teach and I Become Heuristic.** (Kaz Aames, Warner Robins, Ga.)

- CIA: The White Swans Fly North for the Potatoes.** (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)
- NSA: You Think We Are the Thought Police, and We Know You Think That.** (Joel Knanishu, Rock Island, Ill.)
- Department of Defense: The Only Department With Its Own Museum of Iraqi Antiquities.** (Barry Blyveis, Columbia)
- Department of the Interior: We Don't Need No Stinkin' Badgers.** (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)
- Department of Defense: They Started It!** (Baran Alpturk, Istanbul)
- Department of Homeland Security: If You Feel Safe, We're Not Doing Our Job.** (Tim Kauffman, Alexandria)
- Federal Election Commission: One Man, 0.87 Votes.** (Steve Fahey, Kensington)
- Food and Drug Administration: You Would Think Our Parties Wouldn't Suck, Wouldn't You?** (David Rogers, Aurora, Ill.)
- Department of Defense: Because . . . Well, Just Because.** (Fred Hutto, Houston)
- Office of Insular Affairs: Our Motto Is Our Business.** (Tom Kreitzberg, Silver Spring)
- Bureau of Engraving and Printing: The Curiously Powerful Mint.** (Dave Zarrow, Herndon)
- Institute of Museum and Library Services: No, We Don't Have Change for the Copier.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)
- NASA: Coming Soon to Your Backyard!** (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)
- Bureau of Consumer Protection: Got Bilk?** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- TVA: Dam and Dammer.** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- U.S. Marshals Service: For the Last Time, One L, Not Two.** (Bruce Alter, Fairfax Station)

Next Week: Foggy Bottoms Up



But FIRST try to find these lost items—a soccer shoe, a trowel, a badminton racket, some kind of Barbie Doll thing, a Hula Hoop, the TV remote, that electric drill chuck key you've been looking for, your sense of purpose, your self-confidence, just one minute of peace & quiet, any feeling of forward momentum in life at all, I don't know. . . . Is there any beer?



It's your Father's Day Fun Page Beer Coaster!

By Billy, Age 10 1/2, Camp Springs MD

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Vacation Home Nuisance Control

Pest control seems to be a major problem this time of year, but only in the most desirable neighborhoods. If you have property in an area that attracts vacationers, you have been hearing from holiday-bent friends or relatives. Not from you do we get the complaint that nobody keeps in touch.

Miss Manners appreciates that such places are often populated by charming people who are delighted to entertain visitors. As protector of the endangered virtue of hospitality, she wants to encourage them. The best way she knows how is to give them back the control their own kindness has led them to relinquish.

For what it is worth, she is happy to remind prospective visitors that they must be invited, and that they are not supposed to hint any more blatantly than, "We're going to be out your way and we'd love to see you. By the way, can you recommend a good bed and breakfast?"

But frankly, the reminder is not worth much. Those to whom it applies already know, and argue that it does not apply in their particular cases:

"But we're family," say the third cousins who didn't invite their prospective hosts to their wedding.

"But we have a standing invitation," say the people whose friendship has dwindled to a Christmas card relationship, pointing out the phrase "Hope to see you some time" they received only a few years ago.

"But they always ask us," say the guests who haven't gotten around to writing their thanks for last year.

"But we know they want us," say the visitors whose last visit was followed by a series of their proposals that always seemed to be at times when the hosts were sick or tied up in a family emergency.

So if she can't retrain the volunteer guests, Miss Manners will have to retrain the involuntary hosts.

The chief rule is never to issue vague invitations, much less blanket ones, even though these are not supposed to count unless they are followed by invitations with dates attached.

Note that "dates" is plural. It is polite, as well as prudent, to specify both the date on which the visit is to begin and the one on which it is to end. "Please come the 8th through the 10th" is a perfectly gracious invitation.

There should be a warning of what to expect in the way of conditions and attention, whether it is "We're roughing it here, so we rarely dress for dinner and I can't assign you a lady's maid" or "I hope you don't mind a futon, and we have a washing machine you can use. We both have to work on weekdays, but the beach is only a short walk."

But what if you don't want them under any circumstances? This is a perfectly understandable position, either in regard to certain people or certain periods of time, such as the entire year.

The technique for fending off volunteers is the opposite of that recommended for issuing invitations. Here vagueness and blanket statements are exactly what are needed: "Oh, dear, I'm afraid this is just not a good time for us" or "We've set rather strict limits on ourselves this summer, and I'm afraid we can't manage it" are both perfectly appropriate.

Miss Manners absolves of rudeness anyone who says this in a tone of tragic regret. If a guest can decline an invitation, surely a host should be allowed the same privilege.

Dear Miss Manners:
On rare occasions, I add salt to my food while I am dining at a table. However, I do like pepper. Frequently, I will ask somebody else, "May I have the pepper please?" and then I will be handed both the salt and pepper.
This really doesn't bother me—I just would like to handle the situation with proper manners. Would it be more appropriate for me to ask for both the salt and pepper, or, if I were wearing the other shoe, and somebody asked me for the salt, should I pass just the salt or should I pass both?

What are you, a home-wrecker? Salt and pepper go together, like your dear old friend with the spouse you can't stand. You may only want one of the pair, but you still shouldn't attempt to split them up.

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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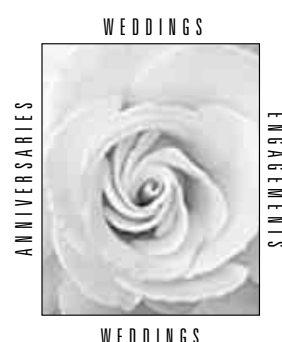
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Remember, all materials must be received 7 to 10 days prior to publication.

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