

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

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| Anywhere but a bathtub | Texas Nurture 'Em | The Bureau of Idiot Affairs |
| Mel Gibson, Rob Reiner and a moose | Because it's sooo purple | ESPN 37 |
| Eating With Scissors | Alfred E. Numa Numa | Well, why wouldn't she? |
| My-Appendix.com | What's left of Tony Kornheiser's hairline | The best mnemonic for the eight planets |

Week 679: Ask Backwards

THIS... isn't really very much like "Jeopardy!" — even though we say it every time we run this particular contest. Then again, this IS The Style Invitational, open (except for last week) to one and all. In any case, here are the answers. You supply the questions to as many as you dare. Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up gets, through the dubious generosity of Russell Beland of Springfield, "The Official Book of Thumb Wrestling," a spiral-bound cardboard collection — with two holes punched through — of pictures of various playing "venues," such as a football gridiron and a nuclear battlefield.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called this 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, Sept. 18. Put "Week 679" 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 Sept. 24. 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 Honorable Mentions name is by Dave Prevar. The Revised Title for next week's contest is by Ken Gallant of Little Rock.

REPORT FROM WEEK 675

in which we asked for humorous ways to be lazy. Well, a lot of Losers took us up on the lazy part, fewer on the humorous part. (The majority of people, for example, included a suggestion that we just fill in their entries for them.) It's pretty clear that August had infected just about everyone.

4 If a dirty dish looks clean, interpret it as clean. If a dirty dish looks dirty, interpret it as trash. (Tim Vanderlee, Rockville)

3 Take a cue from miniature golf: Take up miniature jogging. (Michael Fransella, Arlington)

2 The winner of the glass hand boiler: Why spend time each night trying to convince your toddler that there's no monster under the bed? Put one there and be done with it. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

Use a Segway on your treadmill. (Art Grinath, Takoma Park)

UNINSPIRATIONS

Have some algae and a light bulb implanted in your lungs. They'll make oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, so you don't have to keep doing all that breathing. (Beth Baniszewski, Somerville, Mass.)

Just toss a few of your wife's silk blouses in the washer and dryer, and you'll never have to do laundry again! (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

Suck your chewable vitamins. (Sue Lin Chong, Baltimore)

Figure out the 10 things you say most frequently and assign a number to each. Wear a shirt with the code on it, and then just hold up some fingers. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Fake paralysis. At the hospital, they will feed you, bathe you, and you don't even have to get up to go to the bathroom. Just don't fake paralysis of the hand, or you won't be able to change channels on the TV. (Andrew Hoenig, Rockville)

Change your screen saver to look like whatever you are supposed to be working on, so that no matter how long you are out of your office, it looks like you just stepped out. (Eric Murphy, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

Instead of placing a sunshade behind your windshield, use cookie sheets with mounds of chocolate chip dough. Or... I know: Instead of cookie dough, put up a couple of frozen pizzas — then you'll have delivery AND DiGiorno. (Rick Powell, Springfield)

E-mail Christmas greetings to one of your sisters and ask her to pass it on. (Kathy Boyce, Herndon)

Instead of washing your underwear, just hang it on the blades of a ceiling fan. If you run it on high all night, that should blow out most of the funk. (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

Instead of resetting clocks at the end of daylight saving time, just tape a "-1" on the face. (Art Grinath)

If you just go ahead and induce in the second trimester, labor isn't such a big deal. (Russell Beland, Springfield)

Order a pizza delivered in the morning just so you can ask, "Hey, on your way out would you mind tossing that paper this way?" (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

No one will notice if you relax 10 seconds after every 3,000th Nike jersey you sew! — *Maria Valdez, age 14, Honduras* (Jay Shuck)

Hire a maid, au pair, secretary, cook, gardener and tutor. If she works out, marry her. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

Stp typng ths comply nccsry vwls! (Dgls Plmr, Nnpls; Sth Brwn)

Just go to www.mylazypass.com. Then you won't have to think of your own ideas on how to be lazy. (Ted Weitzman, Olney)

I talked my friend into taking my wife out to dinner regularly so I wouldn't have to. What's even better is I'm really saving money because they're usually out pretty late, which means she's eating a LOT. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Why water your plants when you can train your dog to do it for you? Saves on exercise, too. (Pam Sweeney, Germantown; Kathy Boyce)

Put a motor on your rocking chair. (Jeanie Kunkel, Fairfax)



BY JULIA EWAN — THE WASHINGTON POST

This week's runner-up prize.

He Wrote the Book on High School Elections

MARX, From D1

bling the Muppets, who experience the lives of recent graduates encountering post-college angst — and doing and saying the things twenty-somethings do and say and Muppets emphatically do not do or say. He sports super-frizzy hair that forms a bulb on his head and, on a recent afternoon, wears a T-shirt Samuel L. Jackson might wear if he were a Jewish guy. (The front says, "Shalom," and then uses a bad word.) But he can't let go of that scrawny 11th-grader he was in his ritzy Florida private school, the kid picked last, who decided to win acceptance through a run for student council. So for the past year, Marx has "spent too much time" working to update "How to Win a High School Election," which has sold more than 15,000 copies. The new version comes out this month. "I feel like I'm giving to the kind of kid I was. The real reason I'm doing this is when I was running for an election, I wanted a book like this," he says in an interview at his favorite diner. "I have some responsibility to put something out there like this that will be helpful."

In Washington, so many — the lobbyists, consultants, Hill staffers, idealists and realists — have a hunger for the political game. But remember when elections weren't about the seats needed to win control of the House or the ability to slide in an earmark or hold a committee hearing? Remember when they were about the simple affirmation from your classmates that you were worthy enough to represent them, that they would choose you?

Because even those first elections involve strategy, the book's 165 pages of advice are a kind of K Street consulting lite for

teen pols. Marx solicited suggestions by perusing the America Online profiles of high school students and e-mailing 15,000 of them.

Tips poured in, and they form the bulk of the book:

■ On people: "Go and take the time ahead of elections to get to know people, not just at the last minute. It won't hurt to eat with someone different at lunch or to help out someone you don't know." (Russ, California)

■ On posters: "My slogan was 'pick a winner' and I drew pictures of people picking their noses or their 'wedgies.'" (Maggie, Kentucky)

■ On speeches: "A guy running for secretary started his speech by announcing that he was dropping out of the race. Then, over the speakers, came a pre-recorded tape of what was supposed to be the voice of God (really, his voice), telling him not to be a fool and to stay in the race. It was really funny and people remembered it and he won." (Laura, California)

■ On bribery: "I have one word for you: CANDY! Candy was always the thing that swayed my vote." (Elizabeth, Michigan)

In the updated "How to Win a High School Election," there's a blurb from Marx in Cogan of Edinboro, Pa., one of the countless students who have written to Marx over the years to thank him for helping them.

"My name is Marin and I'm a 13 year old student," she wrote. "Today I was announced the new Student Body President of my school. I was the only girl running and my opponents were all well liked and popular. . . . There is a very good chance I never would have won and the book helped. It really did. Pretty cool huh? Well the girl

known as Miss President wanted to say thank you for the help."

Now 20 and a student at the University of Pittsburgh, Cogan knows it would not have been the end of the world if she had lost her race at James W. Parker Middle School. But back then, "I thought it was the best day of my young life," she said in an interview. "I told my parents and they came home with flowers for me. It did seem like the biggest thing that had happened to me."

As a boy growing up in South Florida, the son of a dentist and dental hygienist, Marx had a private world where he was a little celebrity. Saturday evenings and Sundays for years, he was one of two boy singers in a local music teacher's No. 1 Bar Mitzvah Band, crooning romantic ballads in his navy-blue three-piece tux. Twelve-year-old girls went crazy for him, and in this small universe, he was a star.

But at Pine Crest, a Fort Lauderdale school with something like 55 teams, he kept this life secret. "Guys usually don't sing and dance and put on shows. The guys all did football and baseball," his mother, Wendy, said.

And there was Marx, the youngest in the class, the least coordinated, the worst at sports. Tired of being a high school nobody and "emotionally devastated," he says, he decided to "make himself wanted."

"How to Win a High School Election" begins with his bid for vice president of student council.

He knew he'd have to use cunning to beat his two opponents, one a popular cheerleader and multiple-term class officer, the other a top student who had been on student council for years. Pizza was the solution.

"I decided that the school rule prohib-



FAMILY PHOTO

Portrait of the theater artist as a young man: Jeff Marx in high school, in 1988.

iting students from ordering pizza deliveries at lunchtime was worth addressing," he writes. "So I went to the principal and discussed the issue with him, and he explained to me that the rule was made years ago because students were leaving their pizza boxes all over the school, creating a mess. I asked him if we could have a 'trial period.'"

The principal agreed. Marx called up the local pizza parlor and struck a deal to get students a special lunch price. When the time came for his speech, he discussed the pizza project as "an example of the things I would do in office, not just talk about."

The campaign strategy paid off. Marx

won, and he felt great. "At least for the next year, I held my head higher. I was really proud of myself," Marx recalls.

He studied musical theater at the University of Michigan, decided he couldn't make it as a performer and went to Cardozo Law School in New York, thinking he'd try entertainment law. He passed the bar exam but realized he couldn't live a lawyer's life.

He started his book, and while he spent his days in the world of teen election angst, he also wrote songs. They earned him acceptance into a music-writing program, where he met Robert Lopez. They worked up a musical movie about the Muppets, which won them a share of a first-place \$150,000 prize.

Meanwhile, "How To Win a High School Election" sold steadily.

The movie script went nowhere, but Marx and Lopez created a puppet musical, "Avenue Q," which opened at a nonprofit theater where the collaborators paid their actors by buying them dinner. The critics raved. The show went to Broadway in 2003. The Tony nominations followed.

But once again, Marx was the underdog in the Tonys, up against that popular cheerleader of the 2004 season, "Wicked," a splashy musical based on "The Wizard of Oz." He reached back for his high school election gambit.

"We had a big pizza party for some of the Tony voters," he said, "and we went in and presented a new song we had written for them, 'Vote Your Heart.'"

Once again, it worked. On a June evening in 2004, Marx and his partner stood onstage at Radio City Music Hall and accepted the Tony for best musical.

Like his devoted reader Marin Cogan, Marx knows that winning his 11th-grade student council vice presidency wasn't the biggest thing ever to happen to him. But he remembers when it felt like it was. And that was a start.

TODAY'S HOROSCOPE *Holiday Mathis*

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Though your attention span is shorter than usual, you can use this to your advantage. Ask others to give you the condensed version, the bottom line and the heart of the matter.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Possessions have a way of weighing you down now. A recipe for happiness includes getting rid of 10 things you don't need (and maybe didn't even remember you had) before sundown.

Gemini (May 21-June 21)

Cheerfulness is undervalued in this age, but not by you. You see how important it is to keep the morale of the group up. In the process, you cultivate even greater powers of charm than you

already possess.

Cancer (June 22-July 22)

Every day is a new chance to get it right. This is especially true in your relationship with a loved one. Past mistakes are water under the bridge. Chances are you're both ready to start clean.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22)

You can find the sunbeam of hope on any cloudy day. You'll be helping others who aren't so gifted in the area of optimism, which is both a talent and a learned response.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Your need for structure clashes with your need for variety. Variety is hard to

organize. Bits of life fall into unruly, hard-to-define categories. You might have to turn off your brain in order to enjoy this so-called spice of life.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

After supposedly learning your lesson, you make the same choice over and over again. So the lesson you learned isn't the one you thought you learned, but it's still a good lesson worth pondering.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

You'll find yourself refreshed by the presence of fellow water signs Cancer and Pisces. Together you create the proverbial rising tide that carries all ships.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Mix and mingle with the fun people. It seems there's not a problem in your heart that can't be overshadowed, if not overcome, by the right music, fine food and jovial company.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Many people act as though the pursuit of success, possessions and accomplishment is somehow boring or contemptible — usually, the most successful, rich and accomplished people. Ignore them.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Serious has a time and place — this isn't it. The planets show you determined to be uplifted by your life. If one person disappoints you, move on to the next, or better yet, to a book.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20)

Your intellect is stimulated by humor. You'll be around those who make you laugh, but you're the funniest. Start the mood and watch how others carry it through the day.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY SEPT. 10: You're not easily impressed, but this year brings extraordinary gifts, indeed! Your personal life gets new energy this month with the addition of fun friends and an exciting hobby. A financial boost in November helps you make a change in January. Wedding bells ring in February. Cancer and Gemini people easily connect with you.

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