

CLOSE TO HOME by John McPherson

Mother places more value on character



Dear Abby: All children are beautiful to their parents. My three children are of mixed race and get a lot of attention because of it. The boys are aloof about random compliments they receive from strangers. However, I'm worried about the pressure it may put on my daughter to be "pretty."

I care more about my daughter's character than her looks, but I'm concerned that if I say that to these people, it will come off as rude.

Also, I don't want her to think I don't think she's pretty.

How can I respond in a way that isn't rude to well-intentioned strangers, but at the same time allows me to make a statement about the importance of character over beauty? — *Mom of Beauties*

Dear Mom: When someone exclaims that your child is beautiful, accept the compliment and say something like this: "Yes, my child IS beautiful, but more important, she is beautiful



JEANNE PHILLIPS
DEAR ABBY

on the inside." It will reinforce the message to your daughter that character is equally, if not more important, than physical beauty.

Dear Abby: Isn't the rule of etiquette that when a gift is given, it belongs to the recipient? My mother sends gifts to our infant daughter. She is the first grandbaby, and my mother is a doting grandparent.

My question is what should happen when my child outgrows the items — clothing, shoes, toys, etc. My mother expects me to put them all in a storage bin and return them to her.

There have been times when I have packed up things to give to friends who have younger daughters than ours, or taken them to a resale shop. My mother then becomes upset that I'm not returning the items to her. She is saving them for my sister, who isn't even pregnant yet.

While I have no issue with saving some things for a potential niece, my friends need these things NOW, and I feel strange essentially being obligated to return them. Is my mom out of line?

It's off-putting to receive a gift that comes

with a return clause. — *Confused in Central Texas*

Dear Confused: It appears your mother is not only a doting grandma, but also someone who is determined to get a double bang for her buck. Once given, a gift DOES belong to the recipient. Otherwise, it's not a gift but a loan.

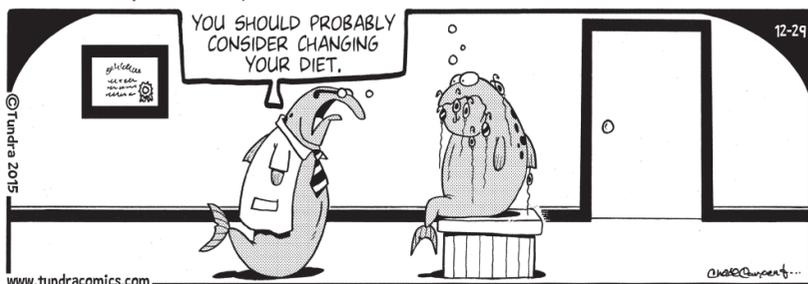
And yes, however well-intentioned your mother may be, she is out of line to demand that everything she has given be returned to her. (I mean, what will she do if your sister has only boys?)

Dear Abby: When I'm dining out, sometimes the flatware is wrapped and banded in a large paper napkin. Do I use this napkin for cleaning myself, or do I ask for more napkins? — *Unsure in Connecticut*

Dear Unsure: Place the napkin in your lap, and if you would like to have more, do not hesitate to ask your server. It is not a breach of etiquette to do so.

Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

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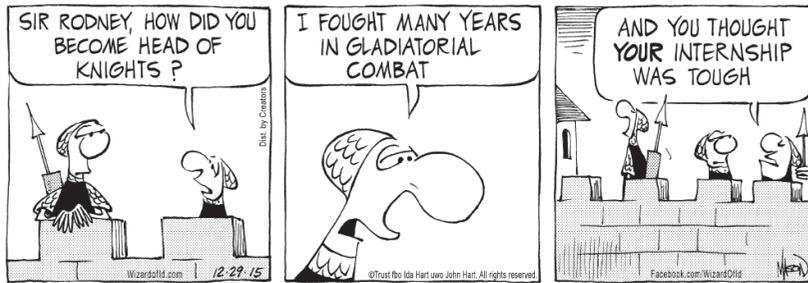
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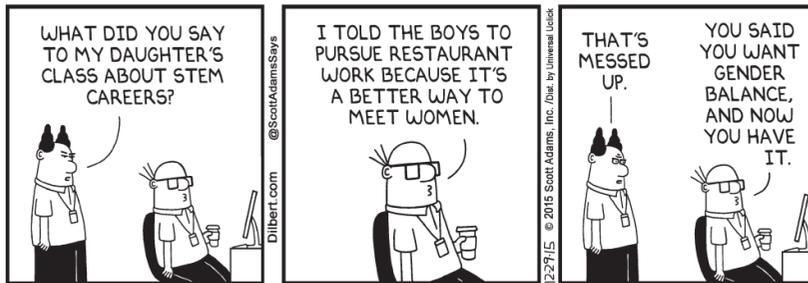
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Daily Horoscope

ARIES (March 21-April 19). Having trouble letting go of old baggage? Don't force it. One of the best ways to rid yourself of the heaviness is to seek new, lighter luggage. Get out there and make a replacement memory for the one you'd rather forget.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Tired people and hungry people are often grumpy people. Whatever you can do to make sure the basics are covered for you and yours will go a long way toward keeping the vibes positive at home.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Sooner or later, we all have to part with our money. You may as well have fun with this. So what if you're overly generous, silly or comfort-focused today? Get what you really, really want.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). When the work (or the entire relationship) seems draining, maybe it's just because you haven't found what's in it for you yet. Figure it out. If you can't find a payoff, consider making a change.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). In your brain, you're going head-to-head with someone and you're really in no mood to back down. Hey — you're a human being with an ego to match. To some extent, that's healthy!

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Considering all the time and energy you've expended working

on a certain knotty problem, it should come as no surprise when you get a sudden craving for freedom and distraction.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). This is an excellent moment to discuss the delicate issue at hand, though you should keep in mind that such discussions are best kept brief and possibly indirect. A pointed implication may get the message across.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Your rating with one particular person doesn't matter as much as you think it does. There is a whole host of people out there who like you, not to mention the ones who love you dearly.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Avoid making sweeping generalizations about yourself. You're made up of many parts. Highlight the thing you like, and work on the thing you don't.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You'll have a deep conversation that doesn't include any profound words or particularly interesting thoughts. In fact, the whole thing, if written down, would be categorized as small talk. But it's not. Not at all.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). "Later" will never come. Also, taking care of yourself should include more than the basics. Giving yourself mental stimulation and fun is part of it.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). When you hit a dip in your mood, remember: Appreciating others is the quick route to self-esteem. You will always feel good about your kind and fair treatment of the people you meet on your path.



HOLIDAY MATHS