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Ask Julia

By Julia Smillie Carey
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So I'm at my sister's house, helping my three-year-old niece Rebecca stick glow-in-the-dark stars on her wall when she turns to me and says, "Juju... you are happy?" Sloppy sentence construction aside, her question gave me pause.

First, I wondered what on earth constituted happiness in her tiny, crazy little world populated with towering teen siblings whose every move she aches to mimic, a brand new baby sister (who she could do without most of the time), and a swirl of emotions, thoughts, words and experiences coming almost too fast to process, including singing "We did it! We did it!" with Dora the Explorer; a slice of mango that you have to put in a napkin for her because it's delicious to eat but too slimy to touch; or sliding down the carpeted stairs on her tummy when her Mom's not looking.

My niece, it turns out, has a far better grasp on what constitutes happiness than I have in my oh-so-sophisticated daily life. When I glimpsed my existence through her eyes, there's no other answer than yes and for lack of anything else to write, I'm sharing this all with you for no reason at all.

P.S. Stop tailgating me!

A stamp may cost more, but the price of email hasn't changed, so don't hesitate to send your questions to askjulia@stltoday.com. And if you have comments on anything Ask Julia, then please post your comments in the [STLexclusives Forum](#). We'll just post them there anyway if you email them to us.

Hey Julia:

Why is it that every summer in this city, our TV health watch reporters always have to make a big deal out of the heat, telling everyone to "drink plenty of water" and "wear light clothing" and "stay indoors whenever possible"?? Isn't that a given? I really don't understand the news element behind this.

I don't think the people of this city will be watching TV during 100-degree weather and say, "OH! That's my problem... this scarf I'm wearing!" What can we do to tell our fine

friends in the media to stop stating the obvious??

Duh in Delmar

Hey yourself:

Back off! I didn't think a *cotton* scarf would hold in that much heat!

These warnings may indeed be obvious to someone of your highly evolved mentality, but I guarantee you there's someone out there watching the broadcast going, "Hmmm... water, huh? Well, it's worth a shot..." I just want to know where all the people are sitting outdoors watching the news.

As for there being a "news element" to it, when did that become a requisite for inclusion on a local news broadcast?

Dear Julia:

I realize that you're probably not the reigning authority on pregnancy manners, but I have a couple of questions that I just wanted to bounce off you. To pre-empt my questions, I'll explain that I'm six months pregnant with my first child (and thrilled about it).

1. Why do people — complete strangers, even — insist on reaching out to touch a pregnant tummy, and what can I do to politely encourage people to keep their well-meaning hands to themselves?

2. What's the deal with baby showers? One of my cousins, who is expecting her third child, is planning a shower, but I was always under the impression that unless they come so far apart that you've gotten rid of all baby-related items between kids, you don't get but one shower... what's your take on that? Also on that topic, do I have no say in who's invited to my shower? Those in charge of it seem to think that it's cool for them to invite everyone they know, but I feel weird and selfish having these people I wouldn't recognize on the street feel obligated to buy my baby a gift...

**Happily gestating,
Mommy-to-be**

Dear Mommy:

It's true that I am not the reigning authority on pregnancy matters, but I'm not technically the reigning authority on *any* matters and that doesn't stop me, does it? So you've come to the right place, and I shall respond to your questions in an orderly if not expeditious manner.

1. I may not be pregnant, but I have a sizable belly, and people are always reaching out to rub it in the hope it will bring them good luck, so I feel your pain. Actually, as annoying as it may be to have people paw your person, I think they're just absolutely delighted and intrigued by the notion of your bringing a new life into this world, and assume that your belly has somehow protruded into the public domain.

The well-bred groper will always ask permission first, and you can always throw off those reaching for your stomach without prior clearance by emitting a loud, pointed yelp, followed by "My goodness! I had no idea you were going to touch me!" Or you can don a muumuu with "Touch it and die" printed on the front, but it hardly seems like a nurturing attitude for a new mother to cultivate.

2. The deal with baby showers is that, much like their bridal counterparts, they suck. Yes, it is unusual for someone to have a baby shower after the first child, but I firmly believe a woman should get a party for every child they bring into the world. After all, it's the last really good time they'll have for 18 years. (We circumvented the baby shower option for a friend's second child by having a Mother shower where we simply gathered for brunch and gave her a few small gifts for pampering herself.)

The guest list for a baby shower is technically at the hostess' discretion, but it seems that the notion of inviting those to whom the expectant parents are close has been lost in favor of tossing the year's most populated pre-birth bash. It's incredibly awkward to have to say, "A hand-embroidered baby quilt! How thoughtful! And you are...?"

Your only hope for avoiding this situation is to speak with your hostess before she sends out the invitations and say something along the lines of, "I'm so grateful for your doing this, and I'm looking forward to sharing this special time with my dearest and closest friends! I just keep thinking about poor Melissa Muckleworth's shower where the Hilton sisters stole the show, and it turns out she didn't even know them — or the Kennedys."

Or you could get a reversible muumuu with "It wasn't my idea to invite you" on the flip side.

Dear Julia:

I am having a birthday party for a 3-year-old who loves monkeys and horses. Do you know where I can rent one of the two to come to a birthday party?

**Thanks,
Liz**

Dear Liz:

Is this because of my joke last week about moniker meaning "wee monkey"? Usually, when I rent my monkeys, it's from... for God's sake! Where do you rent monkeys? How on EARTH would I know?

Besides, why rent one when the zoo has plenty of them for free? Just tell the trainers you're there for your monkey. They'll help you. The horses I have already secured for you. They're in a field in Illinois. They're the brown ones.

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