

The Faker

Fantasy on nice: A faux-functional family gathering

The Faker has a fantasy in which Barack Obama, Sarah Palin and Rush Limbaugh gather around the family hearth, give thanks for their countless blessings and break bread in honor of their common values and shared ancestry.

What? It's possible! They're all 10th cousins once removed or some such, according to genealogists at ancestry.com, and the holidays are about bringing together a bunch of people who would, under normal circumstances, rather drive hot poker in their ears than dine together.

The Faker is so passionate about this fantasy dinner that she went so far as to garner some expert advice on pulling the whole thing off with minimal arguing and little to no bloodshed.

Michelle Tingle (a Democrat) and Debbie Devine (a Republican) founded O-ma-ma.com, a Web site designed to bring together folks of all political stripes and get them talking about ways to solve our nation's ills. How about bringing together a dysfunctional family? We asked. They delivered.

Should the president and his cousins shun our fantasy, feel free to steal this advice for making your own family appear functional. (Especially helpful if you're one of those brave souls who plan to invite a guest to your family's festivities.)



How to pull it off

Plan ahead. Have a chat with your relatives before the big event, and don't forget to ooze charm. "Soften them up and get the mood right," says Devine. "Hit 'em with the nicest, most polite you possible. Then threaten them with death if they are not sugar-plum-fairy nice to the newbie."

Play it safe. If politics and religion tend to bring out the loco in your family, have a few benign topics at the ready. "Stick to Prince William's upcoming nuptials with cute Kate," suggests Devine. "Happy, upbeat, international and shows that you're in the know. Sports are always good too."



Or go bold. "If you want to flip the script and shake things up, you can always open another bottle of wine and toss out a dicey social issue," says Tingle. "Like, 'So, Grandma. What do you think about gay marriage?' Sometimes the things that divide us are the very things we should be talking about with the people we chose to share the holidays with."



Embrace the cliché. If you go the bold route, be ready to fill in the ensuing awkward silence. "Throw out a good ol' common sense adage," says Devine. "'You've got to go along to get along.' Or 'Walk a mile in their shoes.' Try to get everyone to a middle ground."

Change the subject. If middle ground is just not feasible, aim for common ground instead. "Clink your glass and toss out, 'We are all so blessed, so let's take a moment to acknowledge our troops and their sacrifice for our country,'" suggests Tingle. "It's an immediate and sobering reality check to all the other nonsense."



— Heidi Stevens, Tribune Newspapers
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Puzzle Island solutions

Last week's crosswords

"High-grade"

CHARD	GOAL	SLIPS	STUD
BALER	AMMO	TURBO	CANE
SWISS	AMISS	AMASS	CARDS
TENET	TEMPS	OHLOOK	
OPTOUT	TAPES	GRID	
COARSE	KORAN	HERD	SOP
TILES	GNAT	MYEYE	TRA
ASKS	LIED	TOMS	SORES
LEI	ABASER	UNNER	COLT
NAPPED	DANES	EVENSO	
BIGBAT	MIDDY	MEAGER	
ONAUTO	GATOR	MTETNA	
AAHS	PRISON	AWARD	SLY
SPEED	USSR	OKAY	DCII
TEA	EVITE	PROP	CRETE
STD	FINS	BRASS	THENHL
TECS	CABLE	HEATED	
FORONE	BASIE	PSALM	
AVOID	CHECK	AWAIT	STAFF
SELL	ORATE	LOIN	EULER
TREE	PETIT	ENDS	APLUS

"Hi-tech fiction"

LENA	ACTAS	OMAR	
AXIS	PEARL	SALE	
MICHAEL	CRICHTON		
BLEED	TOPRATED		
SER	DER	WOE	
	ROGER	NACHOS	
RISING	SUN	MOORE	
USED	SELES	BEAN	
SLEET	WESTWORLD		
KANSAS	STOOL		
	STS	SPR	YUL
KEEPS	SAKE	STENO	
ANDROMEDA	STRAIN		
NINO	PEGGY	ARTE	
EDAM	STEER	YSER	

"Tell me no more"

PSST	CAMUS	DWELT	HASH
LATI	AMANA	RAMIE	OSHA
ETON	LUMPY	IDEES	NOON
AIN	MISBEHAVIN	THEFED	
SEeya	TONITE	DALES	
PSI	TORE	GASTANK	
FILET	MIGNON	NLRB	MOAN
IWO	SPREE	DEE	DIRGE
DISC	LASTMINUTE	ESTEE	
ONTO	ONT	ODIST	PETALS
	MIDI	GUISE	LAMA
STABLE	CANOE	IER	KINK
ANAL	DONTMIND	ME	EBON
POSTS	ERG	ALONE	EPA
ITEM	TIDE	CEMENT	MIXER
DELIGHT	SOBA	SAC	
	STAYS	TETRAS	GETIN
JETSET	PATRIOT	MISSILE	
ELOI	STENO	TURIN	HAIL
RELO	OMANI	UTURN	ORAL
KEEN	KIROV	PEEKS	WADE

Last week's Quote-Acrostic

(Christopher) MORLEY:
DARE TO DO EVERY DAY:
Read something every day no one else is reading. Think something every day no one else is thinking. Do something every day no one else imagines doing. It is sad for the mind to be just part of unanimity.

Last week's Sudoku

9	5	4	6	2	3	8	7	1
8	7	3	4	1	5	6	2	9
1	2	6	7	9	8	4	5	3
4	8	1	2	5	9	7	3	6
3	9	7	1	6	4	5	8	2
5	6	2	3	8	7	1	9	4
7	1	9	8	3	6	2	4	5
6	3	8	5	4	2	9	1	7
2	4	5	9	7	1	3	6	8

This week's Jumble

SURETY BOUNTY MAINLY EVOLVE BAKERY WALNUT
The novice bookie suffered tough times because he didn't —

KNOW ANY "BETTOR"

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Interactive
puzzles and
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