

Ugly Babies

by Craig Bouquin



A young coworker was told the technical write up he had just completed had to be rewritten, and worse, the task was given to someone else. He was disgusted, and decided to let anyone know about it. He slammed drawers, kicked his desk, and dragged his temper tantrum down the hall, fuming mad, and ranting about how unfair and stupid this was. Once he was out of earshot his supportive coworkers made a lot of unflattering comments. After some head shaking, and mumblings of consensus, everyone sat back down at their desks satisfied with their mutual “harrumph”.

One sympathetic remark that made sense to me was, “What a baby!” I felt this comment explained the problem. The guy had worked his heart out writing an extremely complex technical analysis. He had nurtured this paper for weeks. The care and pride he put in to this cherished document were reduced to ruin with the wave of an email. He had raised it like his own. He brought it in to this world and loved it—like a baby. Then he was told he had an ugly baby.

I respect the young man’s position, and understand his anger. On the other hand I can understand the urge to reject someone’s work if it truly won’t do. Maybe there is no alternative but to let them know just exactly how ugly their baby is. It might have been difficult to do it nicely in this case. But I admit there are plenty of times I would love to insult the proud creators of some of the more aggravating things in my life. There is just no opportunity most of the time.

Take the mechanical genius responsible for modern vending machines. I bet they are as proud as a peacock of this achievement. I’m sure these things are wonderfully efficient and hold the maximum quantity of product possible in the allotted space. I am especially impressed with pop machines that drop the can from five feet off the ground and deposit it conveniently at your ankles. It may be a pain to get your purchase out of this rig, but at least you can depend on a soda shower when you open it. Sorry friend. You have designed an ugly baby.

The accompanying candy machines have a cork screw gadget to auger nutritious snacks your way when you need them. If anything jams up in there, you can bet there is enough mechanical advantage to mangle your selection, or leave it dangling in front of you, teasing you to put in more money. Or, choose one of those brittle roll candies, or mints at the bottom, and rest assured the tiny catapult mechanism will slam them into the bottom with the strength of a rat trap smashing them in to handy dust size particles. This ugly baby should be left in the dark where it was born.

Some others are probably not as commonly annoying, and maybe it’s just my own personal quirks that drive me to hate them. Take my long time favorite, Saran Wrap. Man, do I hate this stuff. This isn’t just an ugly baby; I think it’s downright evil. The inventor of this insanity probably had a deprived childhood, and no doubt, giggles at house fires. I’m sure there is a collection of fly wings in their scrap book.

I don’t know why it is, but I can’t seem to use it without ending up with a useless gnarled wad

of the stuff two seconds after I tear it off. I try to pull off more, and find it has retreated – like a rat, back into the box, and welded itself to the roll so I can't find the edge. I tell you, the stuff is alive, and it hates me. This cruel, tormenting membrane should be banned from the solar system, and all books that mention it should be burned.

It likes women though! My wife picks up the container, and the edge seems to levitate, and present itself to her fingers. She effortlessly pulls off enough to cover a bit of leftover dinner, and it sits in her hand like a sheet of glass. She nudges off the perfect amount, holds it over the plate and the stuff leaps from her hand, enveloping the dish perfectly, taut in every direction, and bonded to the dish like it was super-glued! Who ever came up with this, you are a sick, disturbed degenerate. This baby is so ugly you should label its head!

Sorry... Saran Wrap makes me a little crazy.

Another plastic thing I find oddly annoying is oyster cracker bags. The bag is such that you have to pull it apart to get the end opened. The problem is that the bag –once opened, will split and tear down the side with no provocation what so ever. Once a rip starts, it won't stop. I try rubber-banding the scrunched up end to keep it closed, and you can bet there will be crackers falling out somewhere. I can't understand why someone insisted on using this particular plastic. I mean, why not use a bread bag? (They used to hold up in my snow boots.) Someone out there is very proud of choosing it though. Keep that ugly baby down wind of me, thank you very much.

There is, of course, the “gold standard” aggravation shared by millions of dads around the world. Swing sets. These are designed by extra-terrestrials with tiny needle thin fingers—each with the strength of a bulldozer, so they can tighten the hardware with their hands. It's the only thing that explains the inaccessibility of the nuts, bolts, and screws. You can't get a wrench on most of them. If you do manage, there is no room to swing the wrench. The screwdriver slots are always goofed up in some way or another, and you better have a screwdriver no more than an inch long if there is any hope of engaging the thing. Where do they find those crooked square nuts, screws with incomplete off-center slots, and cockeyed washers? I have looked for them and can't find them anywhere. I think the aliens bring them from their home planet. Send that ugly baby back to area 51.

The latest influx of ugly babies, are popping up all across America in the form new “well thought out” parking lots. There was a time when a parking lot was a big flat spot full of parked cars. They seemed pretty good to me. But then, what do I know? I just wanted to park my car and get where I needed to go. Today I find that a big flat spot is not enough. Designers of these simple things must have gotten bored. Today they are competing with each other to come up with the most complex, logic defying, and impossible rat maze ever devised. I can't imagine what value there is in having countless little islands, dead ends, and dozens of stop signs found in newer lots at malls, and shopping plazas. I feel caught in some sort of video game where I try to find my way out of a magical labyrinth, hoping to escape sure demise at the hands of an evil villain.

I think these most definitely qualify as huge, municipal ugly babies—for the masses. But this visual treat is not only for the average parking lot users. Up here in the Northeast we have something beautiful called snow. Usually there is lots of it, and it needs to be plowed out of parking lots. Not a big deal if it's a big boring old flat spot, but quite an exciting challenge in these newer, well thought out monstrosities. I think snow plow truck drivers are thrilled with the results they see in these ugly babies. I bet they would love to congratulate the proud parents of these muddled tangles—personally.

I'm sure there are other new babies out there, waiting to rear their ugly heads. Perhaps you agree, and maybe have thought of your own ugly baby ideas. I hope you liked reading this piece. After all, I worked very hard to write it, I feel it's really good, and I just love how it turned out. Don't you think it's good? I mean, isn't it just the cutest?

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