

All About You

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Sassy, sarcastic, smart ...

All in the cards



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / SANDOR BODO

Whether it's for a birthday or a breakup, Providence graphic designer Jennifer Adler has it covered

Page H2

Just one thing

We all know what today is, and I mean besides being the day Jason Wu's Target collection is released. It's Super Bowl Sunday, and it is your duty as a stylish member of society to watch the game. You know nothing about football? Tune in for Kelly Clarkson's, right, rendition of the national anthem, Madonna's halftime show, and, of course, the commercials. You do not want to be the only one in the office who misses the celebrity flub, or GoDaddy's latest hot offering. It's not just football (albeit Patriots-Giants football), it's pop culture. Being plugged in is what fashionable types do.

ALEXIS MAGNER



CMYK H1 INS 2/5

Fashion

Accessorize like a rock goddess. **H8**

Beauty

Make eyes sparkle with insider's tips. **H4**

Shopping

On Target: Jason Wu and boutique pairings. **H6**

Parenting

The princess culture clash. **H8**

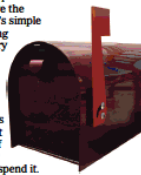
the mix **H6**

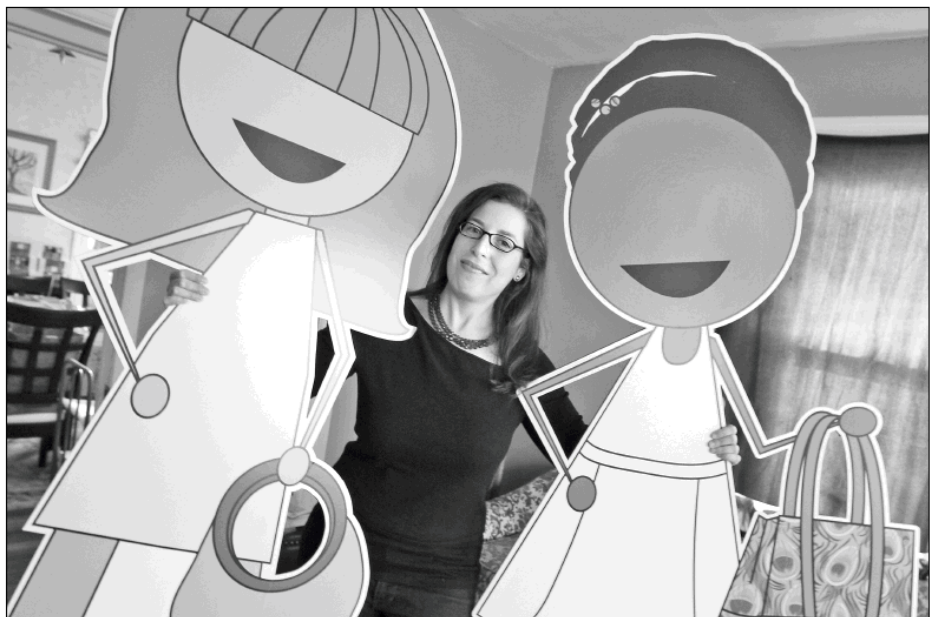
Simple pleasures

Deliver a message

Our cover story on a clever line of cards and our relationship column about Valentine's Day are the inspiration for this week's simple pleasure. Write something nice — or funny or cheery or silly — and send it to someone for no reason whatsoever. The message doesn't have to be anything beyond "thinking of you" or "let's go look at shoes we can't afford." Imagine: A bit of mail that isn't asking for money or asking you to spend it. Smiles are guaranteed.

ALEXIS MAGNER





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Jennifer Adler, in her Providence studio space last month, launched Survival by Design cards in 2008, shortly after leaving full-time work to pursue a career as a freelance graphic designer.

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'They were really born out of a desire to show real people in real situations saying honest things.'

By JENNA PELLETIER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

If you've ever stood over a rack of sappy greeting cards groaning that "this just isn't me," look no further than Providence's Jennifer Adler for an alternative.

The cards in her Survival by Design line are simple and sassy, with phrases such as: "I love you. All year long — not just on this stupid day" and "Happy Birthday!

Hope you're not expecting any gifts from me. I'm broke."

"They were really born out of a desire to show real people in real situations saying honest things," Adler said.

Adler's designs have captured everything from friends' funny comments to acquaintances' Facebook



posts to snippets of overheard conversation.

She also draws inspiration from her own feelings of social awkwardness. The company's tagline, "Send someone a card. They'll think you care," is representative of the clumsy yet genuine vibe Adler is going for.

"[The tagline] is snarky, but at the same time, if you are taking the time to buy a card, sign it and bring it to the post office, you really do care," Adler said.

Most of the characters on the cards are based on Adler's friends. Marianna Zotos of Warwick is the star of two of them, one that says, "My dogs are cuter than your kids" (above) and "Are you kidding me?"

"She kind of taps into the things that we say that are funny or that reach the essence of things we want to have said without necessarily having gone there," Zotos said, confirming that the cartoon version of herself does, in fact, resemble her.

Adler launched Survival by Design in 2008, shortly after leaving full-time work to pursue a career as a freelance graphic designer. During a slow summer spell, she began doodling stick-figure-like characters accompanied by witty sayings (such as "You can only fight stupid with stupid") and e-mailing the creations to office-bound friends.

The computer-drawn illustrations went over so well that recipients started encouraging her to sell them as cards. Eventually, Adler, who describes herself as "very shy" and "not sales-y," worked up the nerve to try. She showed a book of about 20 prototypes to several local shop owners, including Lisa Newman Paratore, owner of Homestyle in downtown Providence.

"I was so surprised, Lisa said, 'I love them, I think they'll be great for the store and I'd like to place an order,'" Adler said. "At that time, I didn't even know how much they cost."

That account eventually led to others. Survival by Design cards are now sold at about 20 shops across the country, as well as a few international stores. In addition, Adler licenses artwork to Recycled Greetings, which produces and distributes her designs to chains such as Target and Rite Aid.

She's also slapped some of her 100-plus designs on luggage tags, magnets, lip balm and mouse pads. Recently, Adler has started experimenting with text-only cards, including a few for Valentine's Day. Some — such as "Will you be my Valentine? Literally no one else will" — are even designed for singles.

The card she gave her own boyfriend last year says, "I'm so glad

FACTORY OUTLET SALE

Friday, February 10 9 am - 6 pm

Saturday, February 11 ... 8 am - 4 pm



Snow Date:
Sunday,
February 12
8 am - 4 pm

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2115 Broad St., Cranston, RI • www.KirksFolly.com • Directions:

From I-95: Exit 18, Thurston Avenue, bear right (northbound) or left (southbound) to Allens Ave. Turn right onto Allens Ave. Proceed south approx. 3 miles to end. Turn right on Ocean Ave. to Broad St. Turn right - sale on left.





I found you. Don't ever leave me." She admits it sounds a "little stalker-ish," but "really, it's just about how hard it is to find somebody and fall in love that when you find that person you really appreciate it."

Although some people have taken the cards the wrong way, Adler says being mean is never her intention. "It's more like I hear you, I feel you, I totally get what's going on with you and here's my card to show you that," she said.

But since her designs are so specific, you generally have to know the recipient "well enough to know that they're not going to take it as attacking or offensive," she said.

One design, for instance, was born after Adler's friend Evelyn asked her to make a card for a neighbor who was going through a bad breakup. After brainstorming, the two came up with "Girl, go find yourself something better. He's not worth it."

Since Evelyn is African-American, the character featured on the card is as well. Adler says she makes a point to make her work relatable to a wide audience by including characters of various ethnicities, sexual orientations and religious beliefs.

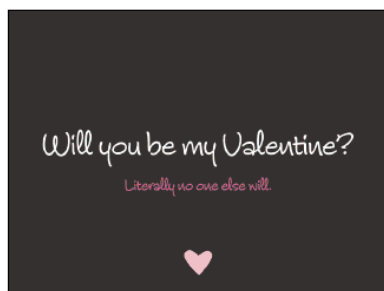
"My friends are colorfully diverse, so why shouldn't the greeting cards be colorfully diverse?" said Adler, who holds a certificate in advertising and print design from Rhode Island School of Design.

Another unusual thing about Adler's designs is that they do not have eyes or noses. That started because the stick figures she's been doodling since she was a kid did not have them. But as the company took off, Adler realized it also made her designs more relatable.

"People say, 'Oh my gosh, this reminds me of my friend Bob,' or 'This looks just like Jean,'" Adler said. "With just the mouth, you can imagine someone better than I could ever draw it. It could be anybody and I like that."

For more information, including a list of local stores that stock Survival by Design cards, visit survivalbydesigncards.com.

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