



*untraditional* **holiday  
greeting  
cards**

A 21 DAY PROJECT EXPLORING DESIGN,  
CREATIVE MESSAGING, AND BAD JOKES

by Deborah Owen

# table of contents

6. the project // 16. the process // 26. the cards // 64. the payoff

# the project

why greeting cards // proposal // objectives // greeting card elements // the greeting cards

## ***Celebration creates connections, and connections give us reason to celebrate.***

This is why people give greeting cards.

It's a small gesture that can carry myriads of meanings, but behind every greeting card is a message of connection. Humans crave connection and seek it out through so many means in 2021.

This desire for connection has manifested itself through a lot of unique trends. One trend is a new resurgence of stationery and cards. In this digital age, people are getting tired of screens and are seeking tactile ways to rekindle connections. Cards and letters are timeless and perhaps carry more meaning now than ever before because of how digital the world is.

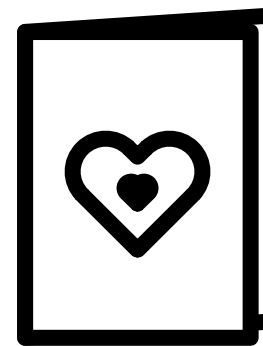
Across the spectrum is another unexpected trend: avid social media users have taken to sharing posts celebrating new or obscure national holidays. Sharing posts for things like "National Avocado Day" or "National Sister Day" creates a sense of camaraderie.

When everybody is talking about the same topic – and often sharing personal experiences along with it – we begin rooting for each other. It builds common ground which fosters trust and strengthens connections.

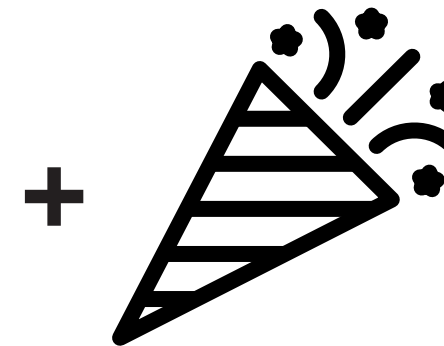
Given the growing trends of giving cards and observing obscure holidays, I was surprised by the sparsity of cards for virtually every holiday that isn't found in a standard calendar.

If it stepped too far away from Christmas, Easter, or Mother's Day, it wasn't likely to be found. And the few collections of cards that fell into the realm of "obscure holiday" were usually dated and tacky.

I set out to infuse 2021 sensibilities into each of these holidays by producing a series of greeting cards that combined the pun-ridden humor that these holiday observers love with quality design work.

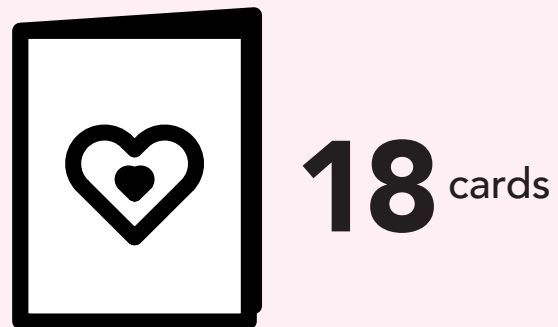


stationery & cards



obscure holidays

# the proposal



# the objectives

Over the course of 21 days, I set out to design 18 unique greeting cards for 18 obscure holidays, creating each card within a single day.

The hypothetical premise of the project is that Hallmark, the most well-known greeting card maker, has teamed up with familiar brands to create the Hallmark Holiday Collection greeting card line.



Each card is designed in partnership with one of these brands and is designed to appeal to that brand's audience. This approach helps achieve several objectives.

- 1 Foster friendships and relationships through meaningful messaging
- 2 Raise awareness of obscure holidays
- 3 Increase brand awareness through partnership

In order to achieve these objectives, I developed a clear plan for how each card would be structured and which elements to include.

# the greeting cards



1. National Crayon Day
2. National Candy Corn Day
3. World Password Day
4. International Ninja Day
5. Wear Your Pajamas to Work Day
6. Virtual Vacation Day
7. Ice Cream Sandwich Day
8. Chocolate Chip Cookie Day
9. World Chess Day
10. Hedgehog Day
11. National Cow Day
12. Talk Like a Pirate Day
13. No Dirty Dishes Day
14. Pi Day
15. National Eyewear Day
16. Lost Sock Memorial Day
17. Bat Appreciation Day
18. Lefthanders Day

# greeting card elements



## the message

Each card communicates a clear message, either a friendly greeting or a simple joke. The aim of each card's message is to help foster relationships and connect to the theme of the holiday.

## the design

The design of each card aims to capture the essence of the holiday within the context of the brand, and in a way that effectively communicates the intended message in a creative and appealing way.

## the holiday

Given that it's a holiday greeting card, the most important factor is the holiday itself. Each card includes a clear greeting, identifying which holiday it was for. Additionally, the barcode on the back of each card is the date of the holiday.

## the brand

Pairing a partnering brand with each card narrows down the potential target audience of the card and impacts the messaging in some ways. Each brand has connection to the holiday that's often illustrated on the card.



# the process

research // ideation // design workflow // challenges

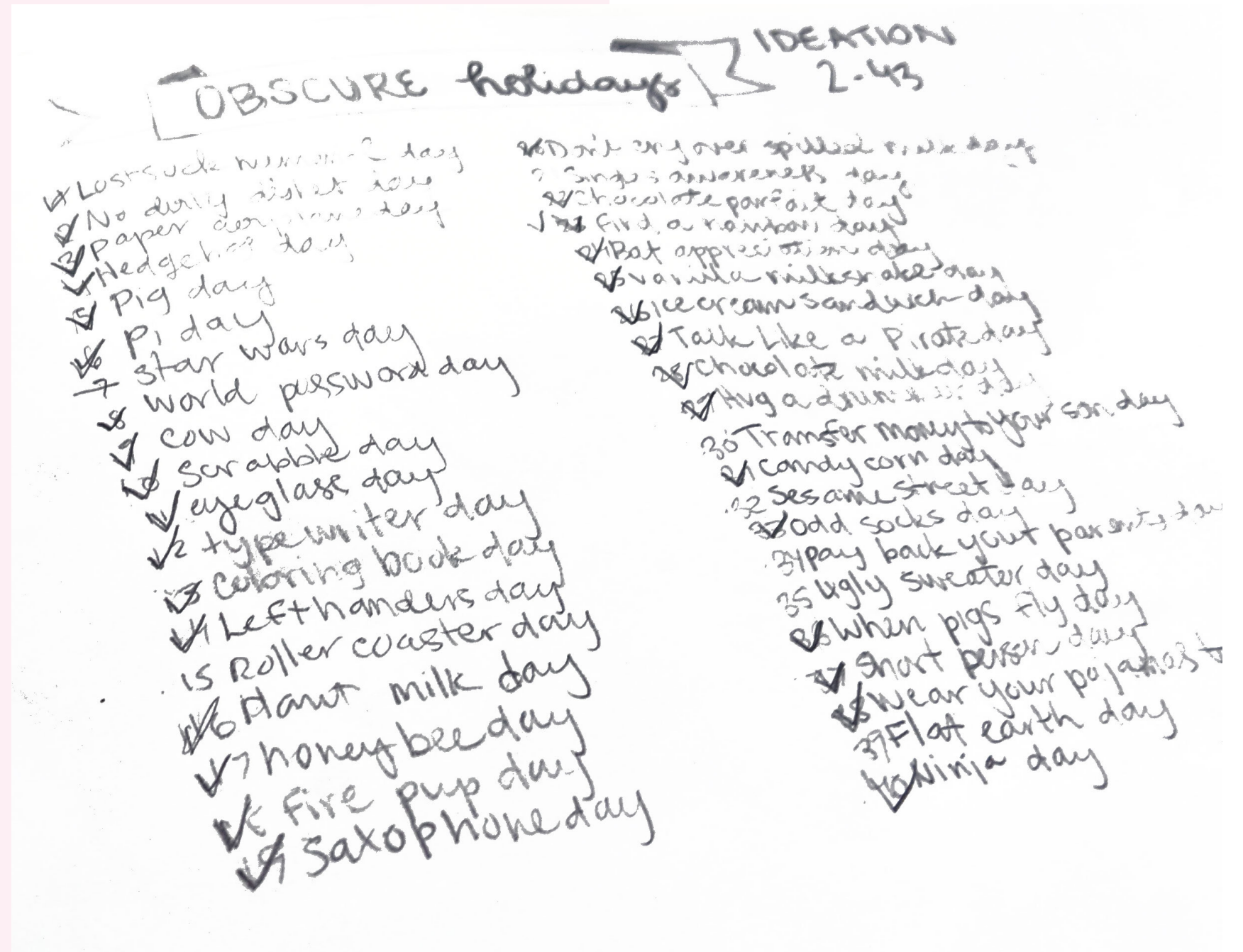


# the research

This project came with a unique set of challenges because of the multi-faceted purpose behind it. To be successful, a lot of preparation needed to go in.

The first thing I needed to establish was which holidays to create cards for. I combed through lists of holidays from multiple sources and compiled a list of over 100 holidays I would be interested in designing for.

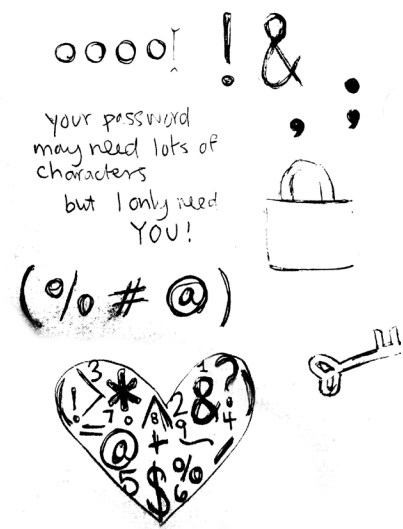
The next step was narrowing it down based on how each one would meet the criteria for the project overall. Each card needed to include a greeting, be connected to a brand and have a visual that would connect to the message. I narrowed down the list to 40 holidays, then dived into the ideation process.



# the ideation

## sketching

I approached each holiday with multiple ideas. The ones I developed furthest are ones where I already had either a visual or a phrase in mind. Over the course of a week, I created over 600 sketches with over 100 phrase ideas, focusing on capturing interesting and creative concepts which would translate over into the greeting card designs.



## designing intentionally

As I struggled to develop visuals for some holidays, the phrase "content dictates form" continually came to mind. This principle from songwriter Stephen Sondheim has shaped how I address most design challenges I come up against. The concept is that the story – the content itself – comes before the structure, and by determining the story you're telling, you can craft a purposeful structure around it and develop something original, thoughtful, and meaningful.

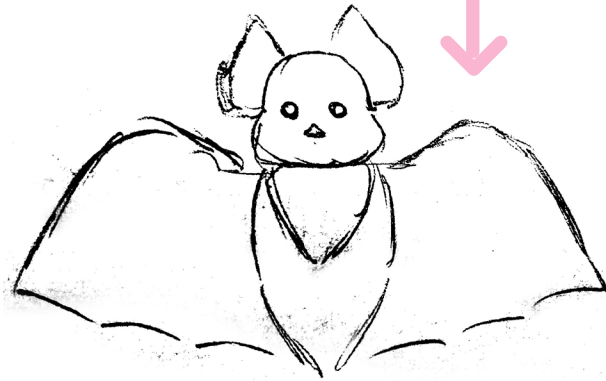
Instead of becoming too attached to a particular illustration, style, color scheme, or layout, I would ask myself what story I'm trying to tell and what feelings I'm aiming to capture. Taking this approach is what helped me narrow down which holidays to focus on based on the strength of the ideas I developed for each one.



# the design workflow

## sketch

Choose a sketch and concept from the ideation period and start executing it. Draw additional sketches as needed.



## draft

Create a draft based on the sketch. Start making decisions on colors, typography, and composition.

## style

Consider the tone the design evokes and the target audience, and make decisions about which design elements to incorporate. Apply these style choices the the inside of the card.

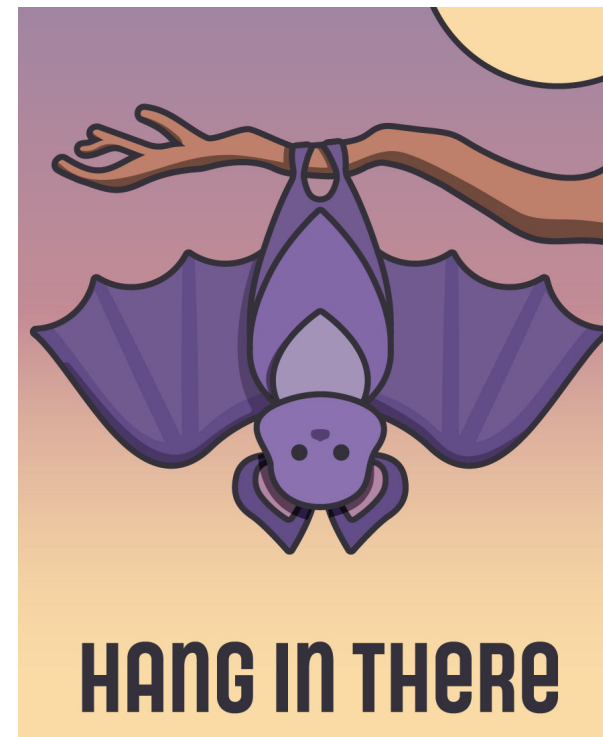


## feedback

Get feedback from both designers and non-designers on execution and messaging. Ask questions about style and tone, then revise.

## refine

Make changes to the typography and style based on feedback, organize the document to prepare it for print.



## share

Export the files as large JPGs, import the files into a PSD mockup, and save the mockup file. Share the design on social media with friends and other designers.



# the challenges

## external

Some challenges were self-imposed, like learning new techniques and software like Procreate. Other challenges were thrust upon me, like Photoshop crashing my computer, or being out-of-town all day and unable to get to my computer until 10pm. I found solutions and compromises wherever I could, still managing to meet my deadline every night.



## intrinsic

The biggest challenges came on days where I hadn't refined the idea enough during the preparation phase.

I invested additional time these days into pushing my ideas as far as I could, but there were some cases where I had to draw a line and sacrifice in order to still complete the design before time ran out.

To reconcile this after completing the 18 designs, I took one day to re-do the three least effective designs. I kept the concept the same, but adjusted the visuals and the writing to better capture the ideas behind the messaging.

To the right are images of the three cards as they were before and after changing them.



# the cards

all 18 holiday card designs

# national eyewear day

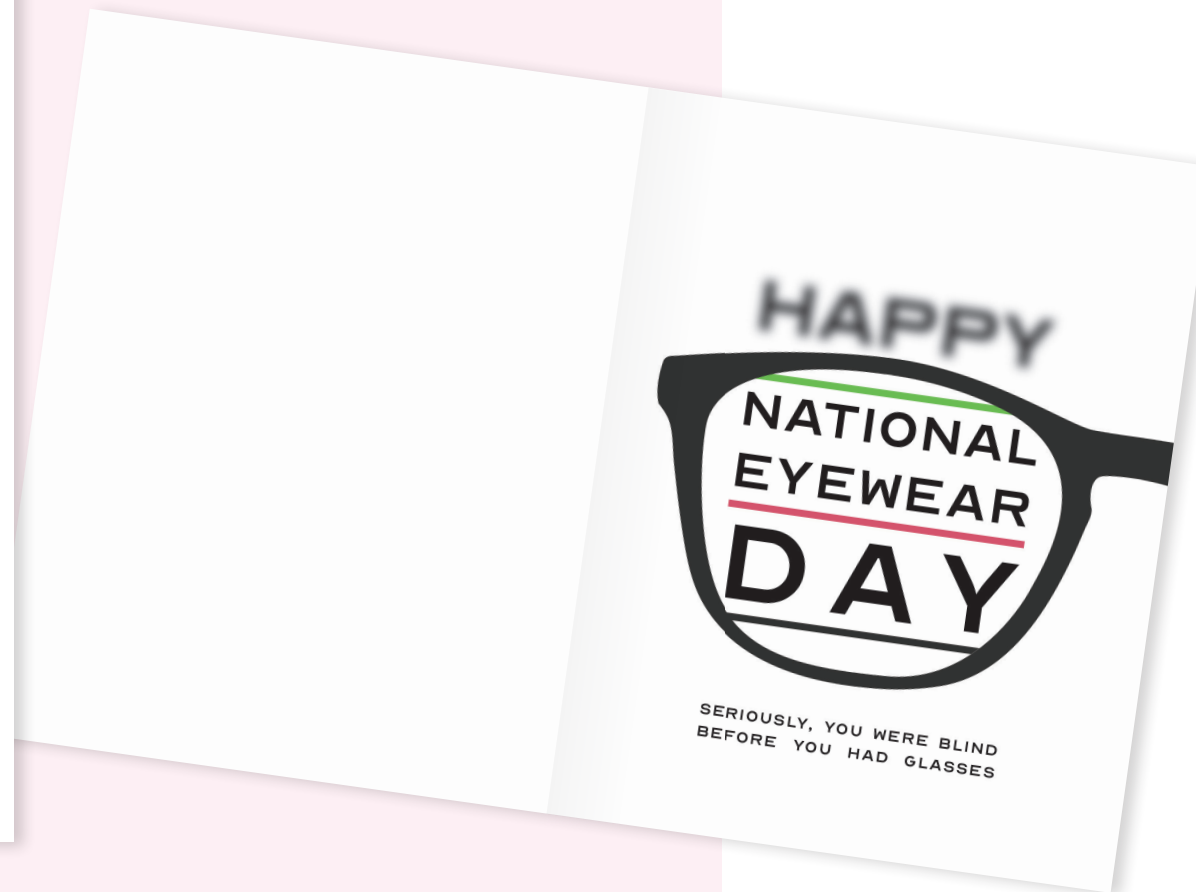
JUNE 6

BEST  
DESIGN



This card combines a unique and funny message with very intentional design decisions that make the message loud and clear. Anybody who wears glasses will recognize the style of a vision chart, and the frustration of

text being blurry when it's outside the glasses frame. While this design is incredibly simple and has very few elements, every decision in the design – from sizing to alignment to spacing – was made on purpose and ultimately elevated the design.



  
 HALLMARK  
 HOLIDAY  
 COLLECTION  
 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
 WARBY  
 PARKER



# lost sock memorial day

MAY 9

BEST  
DESIGN

*in memory of those  
who have fallen  
behind the dryer*

Attention to detail is what can really sell a design or push it over the top. I settled on a top-notch greeting to go on the front, then started designing a series of lost socks while devising a plan to arrange them. I made sure the curve of the text matched the

curve of the clothesline, and that each sock had balanced distance between them. Each sock is pretty different from the next, but the limited color palette keeps them tied together. All these small design decisions culminated in a fairly simple but well-executed design.

happy lost  
sock day

  
**Hallmark**  
HOLIDAY  
COLLECTION

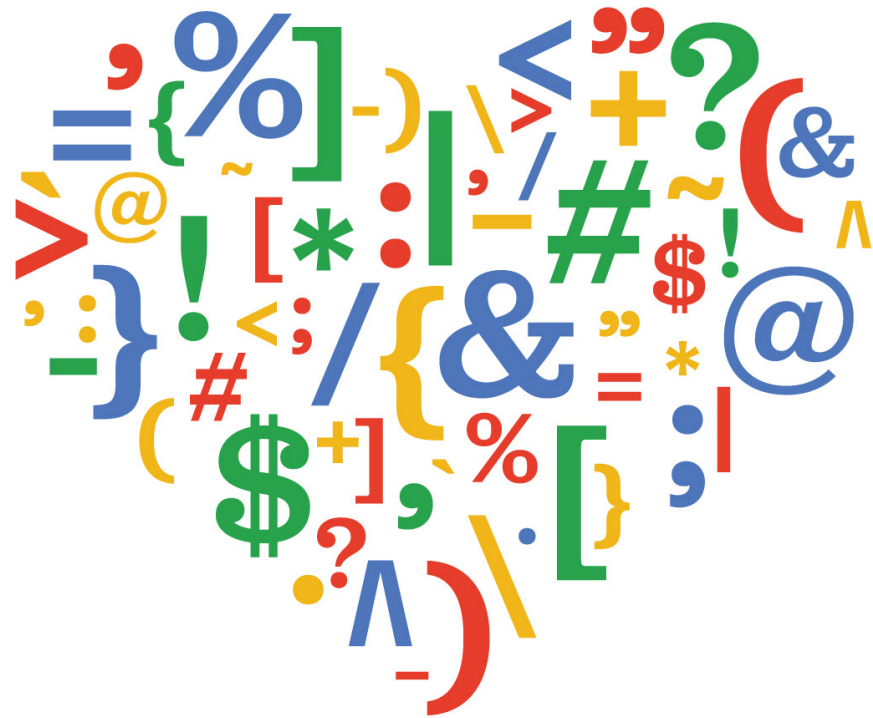
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



# world password day

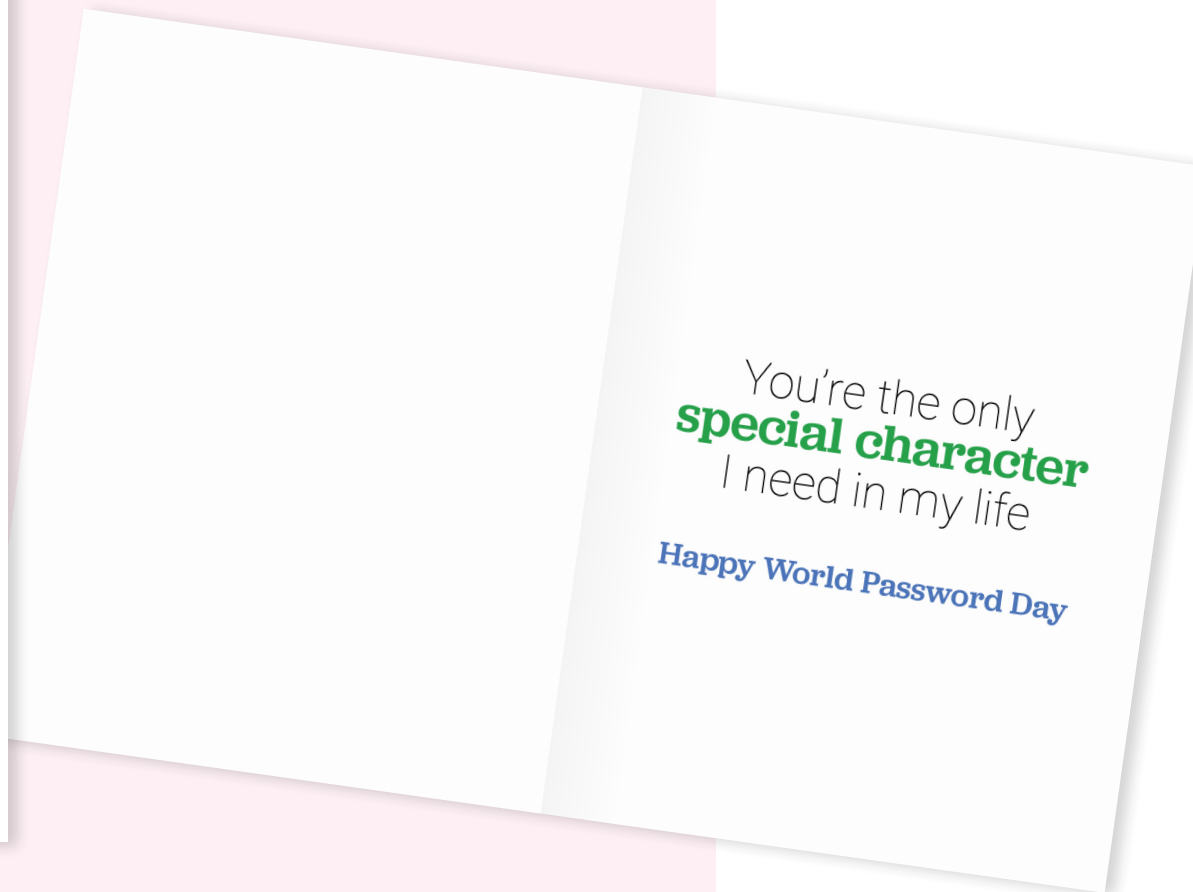
MAY 6

BEST  
DESIGN



Passwords are evolving to be more and more complex all the time, and Google is often leading the effort to update passwords and make them more secure. So I sought out to capture Google's imagery really clearly in this card

design. Instead of text or illustration on the front cover, I went in a direction that's both and neither at once. The heart made up of special characters is an engaging visual that was simple to create, and which perfectly sets up the message on the inside of the card.





# national crayon day

MARCH 31



The one that started it all! This is the first card I designed in the series, and the one where I began establishing the rules I would follow for the remaining cards. This card captures the excitement of opening a brand new box of crayons with its' bright colors

and playful typography. The main font harkens back to the typography on Crayola's packaging, while also looking like a colored-in coloring page. Placing crayons on the inside makes it feel even more immersive, pulling someone back into their childhood.



# international ninja day

DECEMBER 5



I approached this card knowing exactly what message I wanted to convey, so my main challenge was figuring out how to step outside of more traditional ninja imagery without straying too far. I illustrated a little

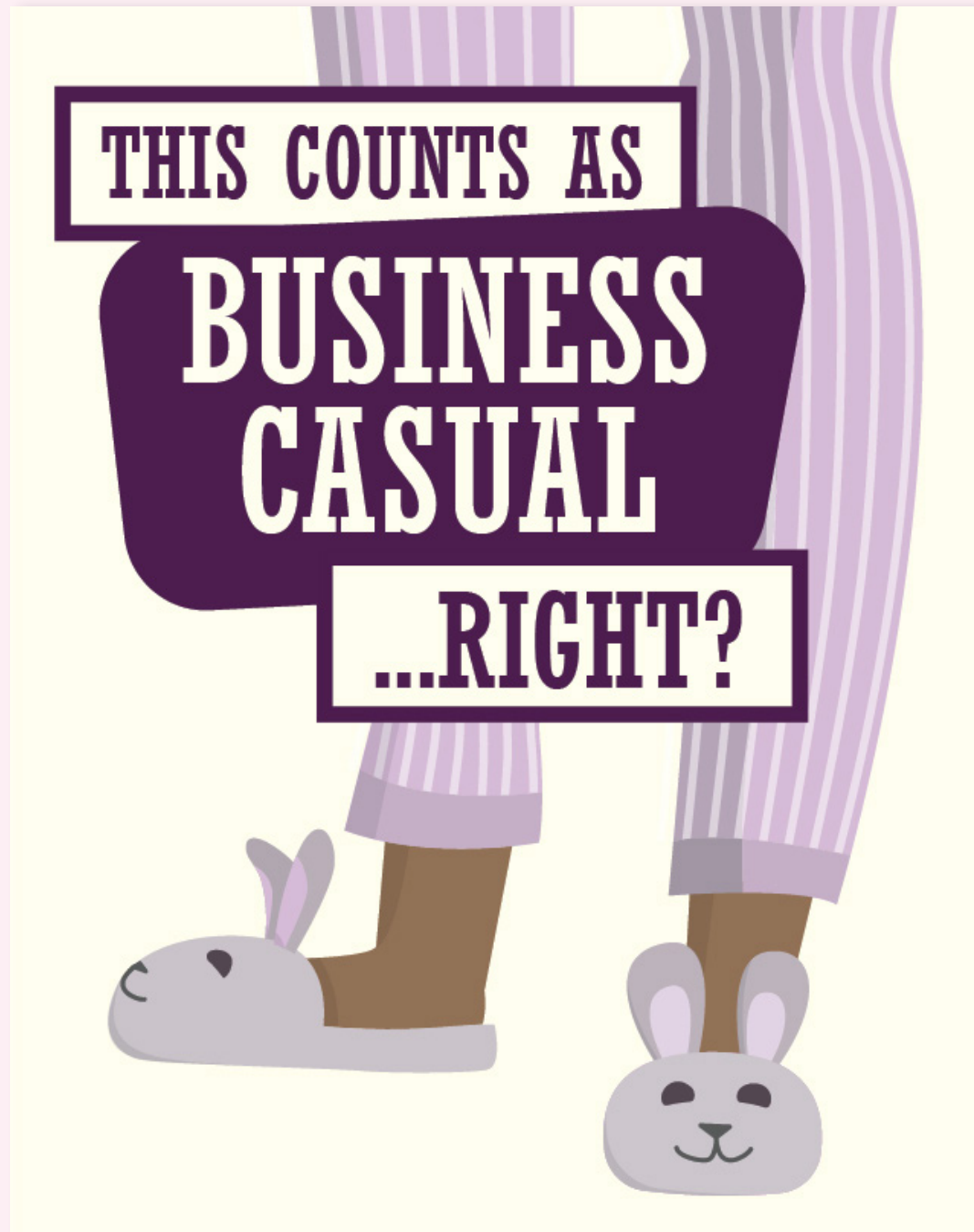
round ninja, forming every shape from an ellipse and a straight edge. To add depth and a little bit of mystery, I added a shadow behind the ninja and along the back wall. This brought in some subtle dimension to the design that helps it stand out.

  
 HOLIDAY  
 COLLECTION  
 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**NINJA**



# wear your pajamas to work day

APRIL 16



This concept had a lot of directions it could go. I wanted to allude to vintage 1960s style while keeping it modern. I looked at a ridiculous amount of ads for pants, sketched a post that worked, and got to work. The illustration took time but turned out well. I struggled to

decide where to place the typography and how to establish a visual hierarchy until I found the approach I went with. I intentionally misaligned the text while creating the illusion of balance through the size and positioning of each text box. It creates a fun and casual style that coincides perfectly with the messaging.



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



# chocolate chip cookie day

AUGUST 4



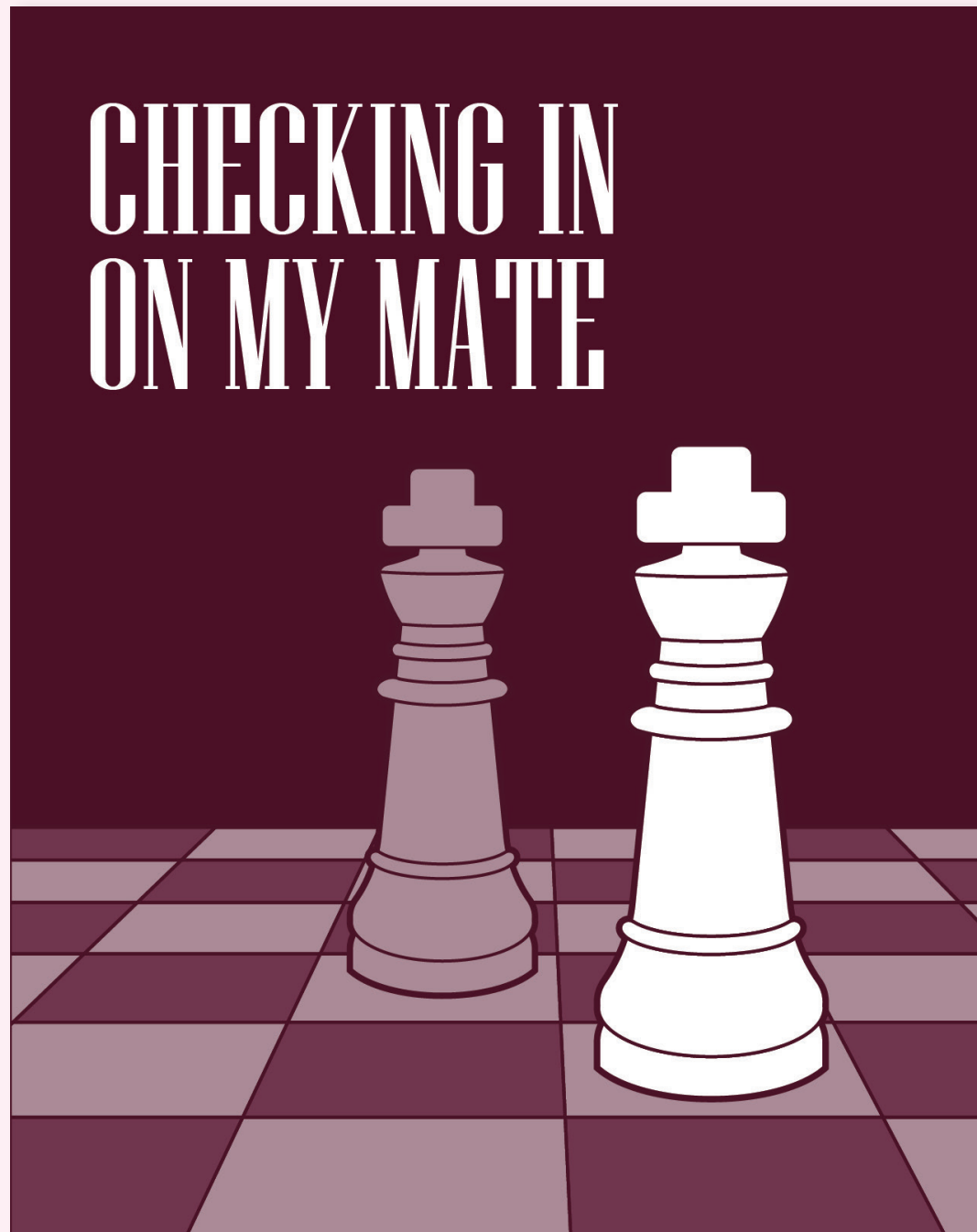
How do you make the letter C a cookie without making it a cookie? It turns out there are a lot of poor-looking options out there. I tried drawing it freeform and applying highlights and shadows, but nothing was looking right. After considering the Sesame Street brand

and the style they use in their graphics, opting for super simple and clean shapes made the most sense. To make the connection to Sesame Street even more obvious, I relied on a Cookie Monster shade of blue to act as a visual cue that ties directly to the message.



# world chess day

JULY 20



Chess is a classic game that oldtimers love to seek out. So I broke away from the more youthful designs of most of my cards and aimed my design to appeal to an older audience. This audience pays attention to detail, so I pulled out my chess set to use

as a visual reference throughout the design process. I decided to limit the color palette to keep things visually subdued, and have the white stand out. While the messaging and design are very simple, the card applies basic design principles of perspective and composition really well.



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**MB**<sup>®</sup>  
MILTON  
BRADLEY



# hedgehog day

FEBRUARY 2



the groundhog  
slept in today

When I found out that Hedgehog Day falls on the same day as Groundhog Day, I knew there was potential. I went through a lot of bad jokes and dozens of sketches trying to nail the tone I wanted to take. I tried bold, blocky styles akin to Sonic the Hedgehog, but it wasn't sitting well. Instead, I chose an innocent and gentle approach,

making this scheming hedgehog character all the more devious. This was my first whirl with Procreate, so I spent time learning the software and experimenting with different brushes and other features before I honed in on this style. I wish I'd pushed the typography further, but I thankfully it doesn't stop the hedgehog from shining in the spotlight.

happy  
hedgehog  
day

  
**Hallmark**  
HOLIDAY  
COLLECTION

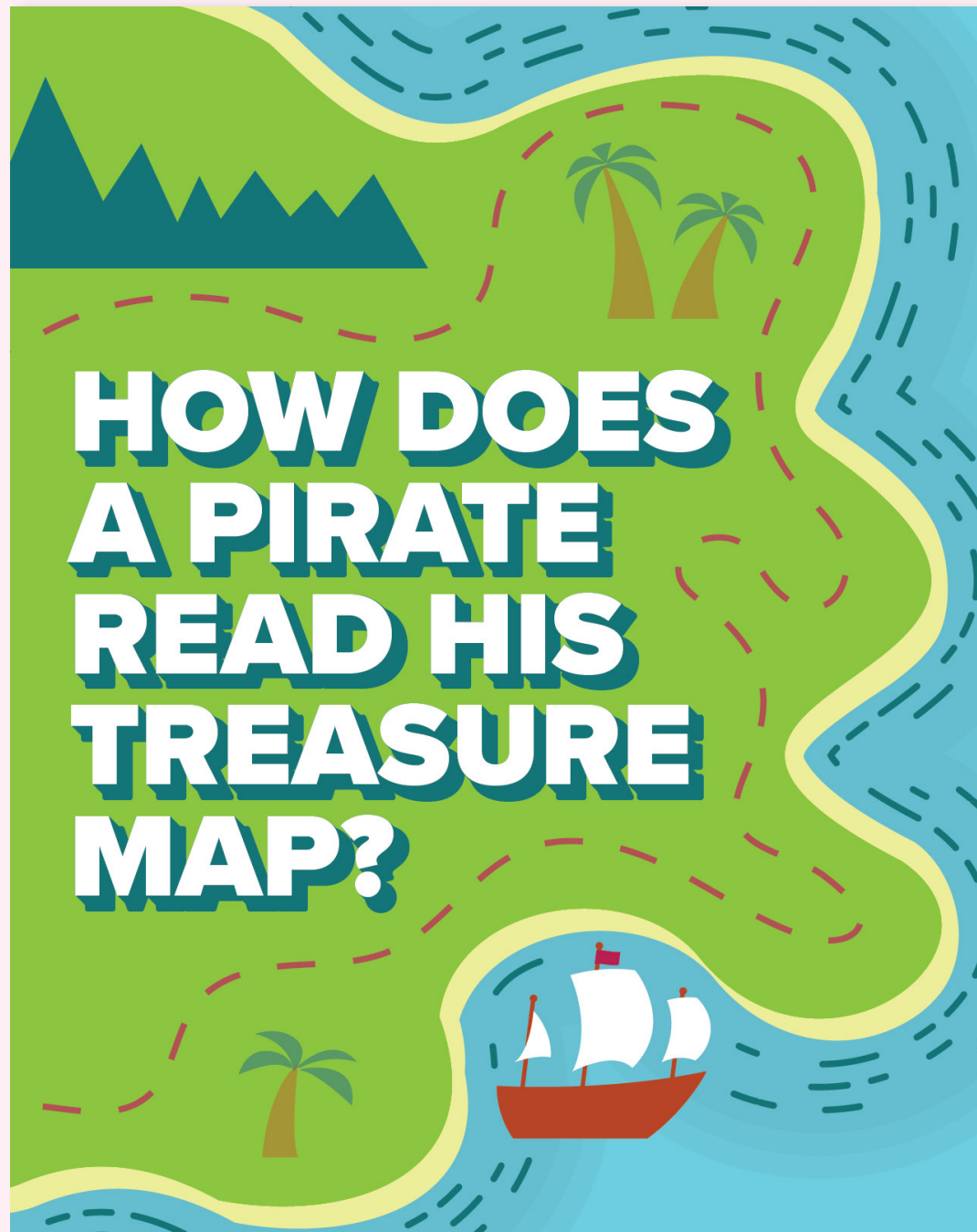
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**SONY**  
PICTURES



# talk like a pirate day

SEPTEMBER 19



Talk Like a Pirate day has been popularized by Krispy Kreme, which gives away free donuts to anybody who talks like a pirate when they visit. I love children's greeting cards to feature to-the-bleed full-color illustrations. And I love treasure maps. So I knew I wanted to incorporate

those into this design. I used a lot of bright and bold colors that would catch the attention of a 10-year-old boy, and consulted a resident expert on 10-year-old boy jokes for the punchline. While the text and design don't directly correlate, they succeed at capturing the tone and making people chuckle.



# ice cream sandwich day

AUGUST 2



This was a case of creating an illustration first before the message. I wanted the card to feel young and playful, like something elementary school kids could give to a friend, but without making it too juvenile. As I crafted the message – the sandwich wafers are the friends and ice cream is the friendship – I thought it was clear.

But as I got feedback I realized most people thought it was referencing the ice cream flavors, not the wafers. Without time to adapt the design to better reflect the message, I left it open to interpretation by designing the inside to match the outside. This design definitely meets the audience, but more work on the message would push it further.



  
HOLIDAY  
COLLECTION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH





# no dirty dishes day

MAY 18



Nobody loves washing dirty dishes, and that's certainly true of the sponge who does all the dirty work. I wanted to figure out what a sponge would do on his day off, and figured a day at the beach would

be ideal – no spoons or smelly food in sight. To inject some personality and imagination into the otherwise dull photo of a sponge, I drew over the image with bold, clean strokes and a limited bright color palette.



  
 HALLMARK  
 HOLIDAY  
 COLLECTION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

**DAWN**



# pi day

MARCH 14



I love nothing more than pi.

To capture this card I ventured into photography, staging a picture-perfect piece of pie topped with whipped cream from today's partnering brand, Reddi Wip. My first execution of the card had a pretty traditional perspective but when I reshot the photo, I focused on capturing the

angle, while taking into account the composition of the card with the text. I initially tried implementing contrast with the text by using a bold slab-serif font, but ultimately chose to use a sans-serif and maintain that contrast by making it white to stand out from the dark background.



# bat appreciation day

APRIL 17



Bats are often depicted as spooky and scary, so on Bat Appreciation Day I really wanted to depict a soft and friendly bat, while pulling in the gentler tints of the colors usually associated with bats. I knew quickly that I wanted to use the phrase “Hang in there” and have the wings outstretched, ready to give a hug. With

that in mind, I looked at a lot of reference photos and sketched bats at all different angles and positions. I nailed down this cartoon bat as a sketch, vectorized it, then got feedback saying to stylize it further. I applied a thick stroke and shadows, which brought depth to the illustration and tied it together well.



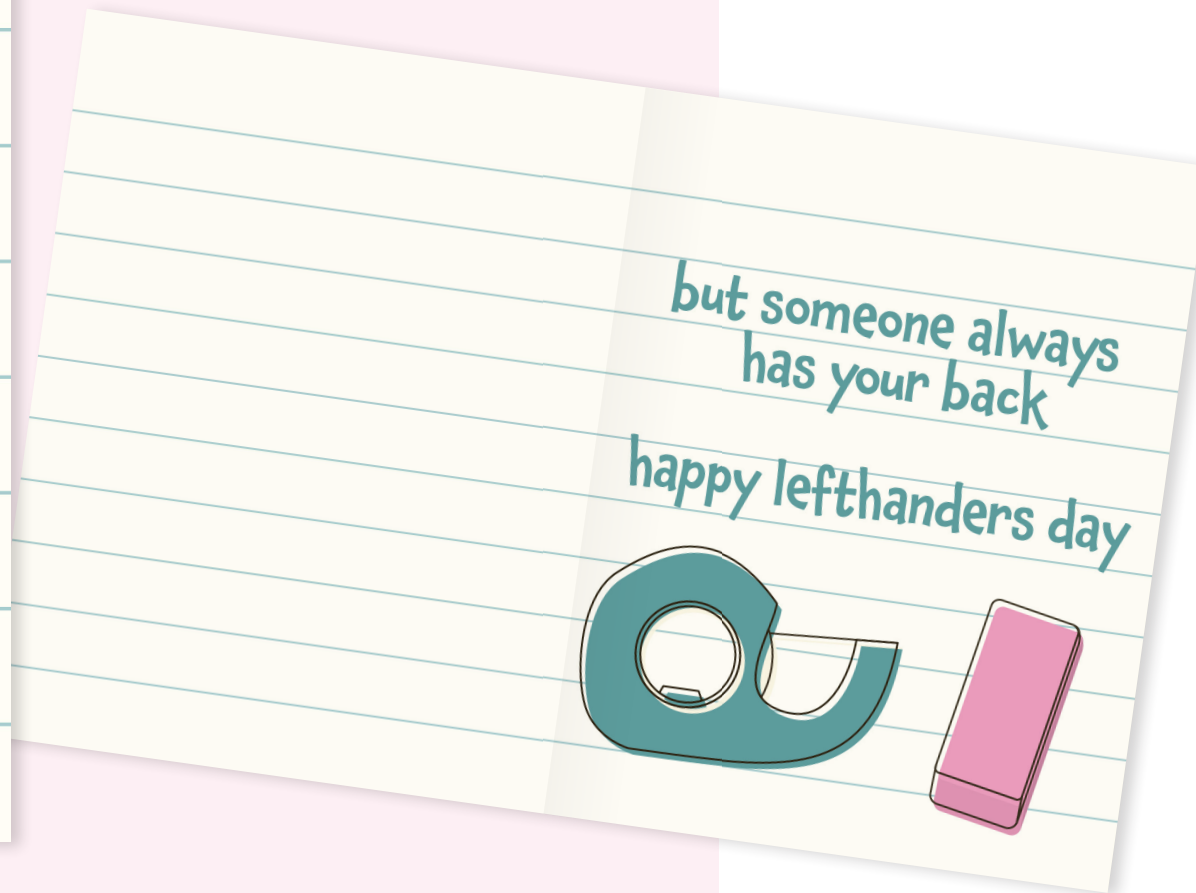
  
 HOLIDAY  
 COLLECTION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



# lefthanders day

AUGUST 13



I love all the jokes about lefthanded culture, and wanted to encapsulate it on a greeting card. Finding a simple way to capture the unique lefthanded experience proved much harder than expected. After honing in on this concept – that

scissors and pencils are problematic – I wanted to choose a very deliberate style to apply to the illustrations. The offset outline style was not my original choice, but it ended up working surprisingly well to capture the playful and youthful voice of the card.



# virtual vacation day

MARCH 30



I started this day with another plan. Then this day had other plans for me, and I wound up spending most of my day traveling. I snagged some photos of the ocean, and developed the concept for the card while on the road. When I reached my computer I had a decent concept, but limited time to execute it. The original design was confusing

and dull, so when remaking it I knew major changes had to happen. I kept the postcard-style typography, ocean waves included. This time instead of using a photo of a laptop screen, I leaned further into the postcard style and added a striped border and stamp place. To keep the virtual aspect, I framed the card with several elements of a laptop screen.



  
 HOLIDAY  
 COLLECTION  
 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**zoom**



# national candy corn day

OCTOBER 30



Some people just love candy corn. I wanted to appeal to those candy lovers with some playful typography. With a phrase like "The only food pyramid I need", fitting the text within the shape of a piece of candy corn seemed natural, with the different layers mimicking the sections

of a food pyramid. I selected a handwritten typeface that almost looks like chalk writing, adding dimension and contrast when paired with the dark gray background. To really bring the point home and tie the inside and outside together, I used the same shape of candy corn and created a pattern of it running across the bottom of the design.



# national cow day

JULY 12



The biggest challenge of Cow Day was finding an interesting phrase to use. I dug through dozens of cow quotes and puns before piecing together the ridiculous phrase “I think you are udderly amooosing”. As I sketched I wanted to play with the typography, fitting at least

part of the phrase into the shape of an udder. It wasn’t until I started executing it within Adobe Illustrator and selected a font that I started figuring out how to arrange it. By choosing a font with very circular letters, I was able to manipulate the letters to fit the curves in a subtle and natural way.



# the payoff

takeaways // designer // thank you



# the takeaways

## *Good design is invisible*

When something is well-designed, it captures the essence of the message. It looks and feels intuitive. It doesn't distract or confuse – and it makes the story crystal clear. This doesn't mean the design is flawless, but instead that it applies the foundational principles of design in a way that makes the message flow well.

As I was going through this project, I was sharing the results with friends, family, and other designers every day. The reception each day was overwhelmingly positive and surprisingly varied. Different types of people responded to different designs each day. Some responses were more focused around the quality of the designs, but most were focused on the messaging itself.

I am not nearly an expert yet, but this daily project was an excellent teacher of this principle. On many days I succeeded at creating a design that looked good and captured the message I was aiming to communicate. On some days I fell short, but still produced something worthwhile, with potential to be elevated to the next level.

## *Content dictates form*

This project caused me to internalize that idea more than ever before. When you have a purposeful message, you need to be completely intentional in how you craft all the material surrounding the message. With a weak form, your content will crumble. But with innovative form, your content will shine.

A greeting card design project could go a million different directions. With such broad appeal to virtually every audience, market, and style, the options are limitless. I could've easily taken an easier route when approaching this project.

Instead, the stipulations I introduced to the project, of holidays, branding, and messaging added so much value. They challenged me to think deeply and purposefully about design, and its powerful role in communication.

# the designer



## *Hi, I'm Deborah!*

I believe in the power of telling good stories. My aim with everything I create is to craft interesting and purposeful messages.

I'm a visual communication specialist with advanced skills in graphic design, typography, web design, copywriting, product design, and content creation.

I'm currently pursuing a degree in communication, with emphases in visual media, public relations, and social media. I plan to graduate in Spring 2022 and pursue a career in marketing and design.

## *Get in touch!*

- [deborahjulene.com](http://deborahjulene.com)
- [deborahjowen@gmail.com](mailto:deborahjowen@gmail.com)
- 258.278.0509

# thank you!

It means a lot that you've taken the time to read through my creative process. This project stemmed from a love for seeing people get excited over things that are meaningful to them. Watching people light up when they feel noticed and appreciated is why I do what I do. Things like funny holidays and goofy greeting cards can help people feel those things and build great connections.

At the end of the day, I just made 18 funny greeting cards. Thanks for coming along on the journey, seeing the good and the bad, and most importantly the lessons learned along the way.