

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 740: Give Us a Hint

AND YOU SAY WE'VE
MET BEFORE?



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

There's often a huge difference between Being Smart, in the academic sense, and Having the Slightest Clue, in the real-world sense, especially when it comes to understanding what we don't want to know. This week: **Offer clues in various situations that something isn't working out well.** A marriage proposal, college application, campaigning for public office, dental exam, anything you like. It shouldn't be an example of someone blowing his chances; it's the evidence that you've blown them.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place gets a battery-operated mini-fan (right) whose blades have electronic chips in them to produce lighted letters. You can program it to display the words of your choice in bright red, perfectly clear letters as the fan goes around. And thanks to its donor, Kevin Dopart of Washington, it's already programmed to say: HEY LOSER! / AN INVITE FAN / IS BETTER THAN AN INKER.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions (or whatever they're called that week) get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 26. Put "Week 740" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Dec. 15. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's contest was suggested by Russell Beland. The revised title for next week's contest is by Beverly Sharp of Washington. This week's Honorable Mentions name was submitted by both Tom Witte and Roy Ashley.

REPORT FROM WEEK 736

in which we asked you to come up with automotive questions likely to make NPR's Car Guys crack up, and maybe read them on the air (we also let you ask questions of Miss Manners and Ask Amy). A vast fleet of Losers wondered if there wasn't some scam in this "tire rotation" thing, since the tires seemed to be rotating fine by themselves. And many Ford Escort owners were puzzled by the friendly but ineffective "Escort service" they received when they called that number in the sports section.

4 My son just got his license and wants a V-8 Mustang. I'm afraid he'll drive too fast, trying to impress girls. Should we have him neutered first? (Russ Taylor, Vienna)

3 My 1999 Ford Taurus doesn't run properly at night. See, I drive a lot for my job, and from 8:30 a.m. until 5, the car runs fine. But then I park it outside a tavern at 5:30, and when I come out a few hours later, it's dark and my car veers all over the road. Please help. (Chris Rollins, Cumberland, Md.)

2 winner of the Anti Monkey Butt Powder: When I drive into a parking lot and set my car on "Park," it just sits there, even if there are several empty places very close by. What am I doing wrong? (Elden Camahan, Laurel)

NOT FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

I plan to drive to the top of Pikes Peak this summer. Is there a training regimen I can put my car through so it'll be prepared for the altitude? (Howard Waldeman, Columbia)

I have one of those "I am proud of my honor roll student" bumper stickers on my 2005 Caravan, but my son has just informed me that he will be getting a C in history this quarter. My wife has suggested selling the van, while I prefer to park it in the garage and drive a rental until our son regains his honor roll status. We welcome your opinion in this matter. (Chris Rollins)

How do I mount my .50-caliber machine gun on top of my Hummer so that my CD player doesn't skip when I shoot? (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

Yeah, I've got a 12-cylinder Lamborghini Murcielago. The LP640, with the 6496cc engine with the 88mm x 89mm bore and stroke and the 11.0:1 compression ratio. You know, the one with the 272-mm clutch. Anyway, what I'm wondering is: What are all those little gauges and lights and thingamabobs on the dash for? (Russell Beland, Springfield)

This has bugged me since I was a kid: Fred Flintstone's car was a foot-powered vehicle, with a cab resting above two cylindrical rollers. My question is: How did it turn corners? (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

The image from my backup camera is obscured by something that looks like a paw or small hand. Is this a problem with the camera or a problem with the screen? (Ben Aronin, Washington)

If I've locked my keys in my 2007 Toyota Solara convertible and it's about to rain, is there a manual way to get the top up before it storms? (Miranda Longstreth, Washington)

I took my car into the dealer, and they said I need my exhaust system flushed, brake disks rotated, power steering grommet tightened and headlights re-bored. My question: Should I get the undercoating package, too? (Russ Taylor)

My big brother and his girlfriend like to park down the street and make out. Me and my buddy want to shake them up by whacking the bumper real hard to make the air bags pop out. Will we need, like, a couple of railroad ties, or will a full shopping cart do the trick? (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

My "check engine" light went out while I was driving to work in heavy traffic, after it'd been on for two months. What kind of bulb should I buy to replace the one that went out and how do I put it in? (Jonathan Gettleman, Ashburn)

Please settle this argument: I always save on gas by never letting the tank go less than half-full, while my wife runs it down near the



BY KEVIN DOPART

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

When I get my 2004 Mustang up to about 85 miles an hour, I hear a high-pitched whining off to my right that persists until I wind down to 60. What can I do to shut her up? (Chris Rollins)

E. This way I can fill it up for only \$15, while it costs my wife \$30. She says it doesn't matter, 'cause she makes up for it by avoiding jackrabbit starts and stops. Who's right? (Steve Fahey)

What would possess Jay Shuck of Minneapolis to mistake the CLEARLY MARKED engine coolant reservoir in a 2000 Honda Civic for the windshield wiper fluid container? (Jay Shuck's wife, Minneapolis)

Dear Click and Clack: Do you know of any cars where the clutch and accelerator pedals aren't so close together? Sincerely, L. Craig, Boise (Elwood Fitzner, Valley City, N.D.)

Hey, is this the Terry Gross show? (Tom and Ray Magliozzi, Greater Boston)

TO MISS MANNERS & ASK AMY

When breaking up with a girlfriend by text message, is it okay to abbreviate words using "text speak," or would that come across as rude and insensitive? I mean, if you're really in a hurry. (Jon Reiser, Hilton, N.Y.)

My psychotic boyfriend mailed me his severed left ear after a bad argument. We've now broken up. Am I required to return the ear? (Jay Shuck)

Dear Amy: The letter from "Miffed in Topeka" could have been written by me, except I've never been to Kansas, and I'm not a woman, and I don't work in an office, and my son is not on drugs, and my boss isn't hitting on me, my best friend isn't gay, and I don't have a crush on my rabbi (I'm not even Jewish). But your answer really helped me a lot. Thanks! (Chris Rollins)

Next Week: No River, No Woods, or Taking Off on the Holidays

This week's prize: A Loser's number one fan.

A Portrait of Her Husband & the 'Other Woman' He Loved

FALL, From C1

he detailed the agony of the French army's defeat in Vietnam in his 1960s books "Street Without Joy" and "Hell in a Very Small Place."

He wrote passionately, and when he was silenced by death his memory was set aside amid the pain of his passing and the new life his family was forced to begin. The haunting tape was still in the damaged tape recorder that Dorothy Fall received along with other personal effects: his smashed camera with film also still in it, his helmet and the clothes he had on when he died.

Fall, now 77, always wanted to write a book about her husband. And she began it in 1972 — five years after he and one of the Marines he was with were killed that afternoon near Hue. But her emotions were still raw. She was not yet ready to relinquish him to history.

His death made front-page news around the world. Only 40 when he died, Fall was a celebrated and controversial scholar of the disastrous French war in Indochina in the 1950s, and he preached of the hazards of conflict there.

He was a man whose warnings could have changed U.S. policy — if only the American presidents, Kennedy and Johnson, had read his work. That is what former secretary of state Colin L. Powell, who served as an officer in Vietnam, wrote of Fall years later.

Fall was an outside figure. A member of the French underground during World War II and a professor at Howard University, his home, where his wife still lives, was visited by politicians, government officials and journalists seeking guidance on Vietnam.

He interviewed the Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh and was deeply moved by the heroism and sacrifice of the French military, which lost 95,000 soldiers during its struggle in Vietnam.

But he was sobered by the enemy's resolve and by the crushing hardship of fighting in the fastness of Southeast Asia.

For a time, he was thought by the U.S. government to be a French spy, and the FBI staked out the family home, tapped the phone and read the mail, his wife said.

Dorothy Fall, an accomplished artist, was 36 when her husband died, leaving her with an infant and two other small children. They had been married for 13 years.

She was the Dorothy to whom he dedicated one book and "the American girl who is now my wife" in the preface to another.

They met in 1952 at Syracuse University, where she was a student and he was a visiting Fulbright scholar.

He was a native of Vienna who had lost both parents in the Holocaust, but he fought in the French resistance and French army during World War II. He rarely told people where he was born; he considered himself French.

She was a sheltered girl from Rochester,



BY LOUIS RAIMONDO — THE WASHINGTON POST

To finally write about her husband, Dorothy Fall used the artist in her to reconnect with the Vietnam that Bernard had come to know so well.

N.Y., the daughter of an immigrant tailor who worked as a pocketmaker for a big clothing company.

The couple fell in love and married two years later. But Bernard had already come under the spell of a jealous mistress, as he and his wife both put it: Vietnam.

He had become fascinated with the country while studying in Washington at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in 1952. He decided to make it the subject of his dissertation.

Vietnam was a remote and exotic land caught up in the titanic struggle of the Cold War. It was a place where some of the fighting was still done with poison darts and blowguns. Fall would report, and where France was losing its battle with the communists.

Fall made his first research trip to Vietnam in 1953 and another in 1957. He went to Thailand, Laos and briefly back to Vietnam in 1959. He published "Street Without Joy" — named after the same guerrilla-infested strip north of Hue where he would later be killed — in 1961.

That same year, he and his family moved to Cambodia for six months. While there, Fall asked for and was granted permission to visit North Vietnam. He stayed for two weeks and landed rare interviews with Ho Chi Minh and North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong.

Back home in 1963, Fall found that he had become a sensation. He was interviewed on network TV, and wrote, lectured and taught incessantly. And he irritated the State Depart-

ment, which considered him to be a "neutralist, crypto-communist," his wife learned later.

Dorothy moved the family into the house in Washington's Forest Hills neighborhood that would be her home for the next 40 years, and Bernard's for the next three.

It was airy and modern, and had a huge stone fireplace that was open on two sides. Bernard would set up his office in the front of the basement; Dorothy would take the back for her art.

But at that moment in 1963, Bernard got sick. He developed a rare disorder that was strangling his kidneys and colon with fibrous tissue. He wound up in the hospital for two months, and one of his kidneys had to be removed.

It was a hard time for the Falls, made worse by the obvious surveillance of the FBI, which was stationed outside the house observing the family's mundane comings and goings.

While the FBI watched, U.S. involvement in Vietnam deepened, the national debate over the war became poisonous and Fall's profile grew.

Sens. Edward M. Kennedy and George McGovern came to visit, along with CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite and journalists Tom Wicker, Stanley Karnow and David Halberstam.

Fall returned to Vietnam in 1965 and began work on his book "Hell in a Very Small Place," a moment-by-moment account of the

1954 siege of the French outpost at Dien Bien Phu.

He finished it in 1966, won a George Polk Award for interpretive reporting the same year, and then a Guggenheim fellowship for a study of the Viet Cong.

Amid the crescendo of war and public protest, Fall had become one of the leading scholars of Vietnam.

And now he had to go back. This time, his family would be close by. Dorothy and the children would move to Hong Kong to make visiting possible.

As he prepared to leave on Dec. 8, 1966, he and his wife were both worried.

Earlier, he had made a tape recording for her, to be played if anything should happen to him. She found it after his death. In it, he expressed his love but noted the "fairly rough five or six years of psychological pressure" he had been under, and he urged her to conduct a thorough investigation if there was anything suspicious about his demise.

That morning, all she could say, she would write later, was "Bernard, don't go."

He said he had to. Fall was in Vietnam before Christmas, but it was February by the time Dorothy rented out their home and moved the children to Hong Kong.

She had just enrolled them in school, and on Feb. 21, Dorothy had lunch with Annette Karnow, a fellow artist and the wife of the historian, who was then a Hong Kong-based reporter for The Washington Post.

Six hundred miles away, Bernard was on his last patrol.

He had jumped at the chance to go on, what was for him, a profound journey.

Fourteen years after the futile French assault on the "Street Without Joy" sector north of Hue, an attack that Fall had chronicled, at a place that he had made famous, the Marines were going back.

"February 19, comma, nineteen hundred and sixty-seven," Fall had begun his last recording three days before. "This is Bernard Fall in the Street Without Joy."

It was late at night when Dorothy heard the knock on the door of her home in Hong Kong. There, with two other friends, stood Annette Karnow, whose husband had been working late and had just heard the news: Bernard had stepped on an enemy land mine. He died instantly.

In 1995, Robert S. McNamara, the secretary of defense during much of the Vietnam War, published a memoir in which he lamented the lack of Vietnam experts who might have helped the U.S. avoid its mistakes there.

Dorothy Fall was incensed: She knew that one of the most renowned Vietnam experts had lived less than 10 miles from the Pentagon, and McNamara had never called.

She was then in her mid-60s. Her companion and housemate for more than 20 years, the Cold War national security analyst Arthur Macy Cox, had died two years before. Theirs was a rich life. But while he was living, she says, "I really didn't feel I could write about my previous husband."

Now, free and motivated, perhaps she could. Bernard was still there in those boxes in the basement.

But Vietnam was so long ago. How could she reconnect with those times and unlock a story that had been closeted for so long? She used the most familiar tool she had: her art.

Slowly she began to paint scenes of Vietnam — kaleidoscopic images of lush landscapes, people, color, war. Many included renderings of a woman with burning red eyes, or a murky female face glimpsed as if under water.

The art opened the door to the writing. "I really was able to touch on my emotions," she said. "I had kept a lot of them sort of hidden ... for all those years ... subjugated."

A quarter-century after she packed them away, she dusted off her memories of Bernard and resumed work on the book.

Last year, four decades after he left their home for the last time, she published "Bernard Fall, Memories of a Soldier-Scholar." The paperback is due out any day, she says.

Earlier this month, as Vietnam veterans prepared to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Wall, Fall stood by the desk where her husband had worked and said she still has dreams of his return. "Where've you been hiding all these years?" she asks him. "Why did you leave us?"

And often in these dreams she senses the presence of the other woman. Vietnam.