

# MY PIECE OF MIND

George Dunn

## Shy?

This month's theme, "Ending the Affair," is a little sparse. In fact, I received no contributions on it. Help me to understand something here: I doubt that this was an area in which we are all inexperienced, so was it too personal, too painful to share? Drop me a line and tell me. Put "Not for Publication" on it if that's your desire.

I don't know as of this writing, but I'm hoping July's theme, on Flags, will be a good one. That should not be an emotional task for anyone, although it does call for some visual creativity.

On the other hand, September is already well represented. Apparently opinions on the school system are not ones we're shy about expressing.

\* \* \*

In other news, CIM's Culture-Quest team rang up a 145, and I think I should be able to challenge that up at least five points. I doubt that's enough to be in the money, although I heard that the Steinhice Family didn't field a team this year.

\* \* \*

It's not too late to get on the Proxy bandwagon. Although we now have the required minimum, authorizing Mensa to vote your "shares" would be a nice gesture of solidarity. Plus, doing it now (if you haven't done it already, of course) would be somehow more munificent because there would be no question that you were only doing it to escape being shamed into it.

\* \* \*

The last couple of months have been better for Mensa than for the U.S. First April was both the deadliest month in Iraq and ironically the anniversary of President Bush's carrier landing-cum-victory speech, and then May opened with the scandal of the 372nd MPs abusing (I reserve the word "torture" for situations that deserve it) Iraqi prisoners. [*October's theme is "Scandal"*] At the end of this month, we're supposed to give them their country back, all spiffed up and proto-democratic. I doubt it will be a very poignant ceremony.

\* \* \*

(Watch me go for this segue) While the Iraqis are already getting nostalgic for the dear old times of a Saddam statue on every corner, a secret policeman in every cafe and the faint sounds of screams in the night, I find myself musing about the days when the Letters page was alive with indignation over the previous month's articles. I guess I should be grateful that the current readers are so calm, but lately it's been the calm of the graveyard. Isn't anybody out there passionate about anything?

\* \* \*

You know the AG is coming up. I don't know many who are going, as it is rather pricey this year, being in Las Vegas, but it is THE big Mensa event. Now, this is in no way an attempt to seduce you away from the AG if you're already planning to go, but if you've written it off, there is a Fourth of July Gathering (FOJG) right "next door" in Ohio you might consider.

## Bonus Editorial

### "Softening Up"

The saddest thing about the Iraqi prison scandal is the way the government is still trying to pretend that it was all the doing of a few aberrant soldiers when it was obviously policy. I swear I heard a colonel tell a reporter that a PFC was the ringleader! If she has that kind of natural command authority, perhaps she and the colonel should switch ranks.

I was in the Army. A PFC doesn't paint a rock unless somebody tells him to; the idea that a few grunts started their own interrogation program under the noses of the brass does not ring true. Compared to that kind of oversight, Werner Klemperer's "Colonel Klink" was a paragon of a camp manager.

Here's what happened: CIA hirelings, accustomed to never being accountable for anything except "getting the job done" got in direct authority over some GIs. These they told to "soften up" the prisoners with some hazing and humiliation. Nobody was explicit; the company guys just encouraged and discouraged performance until they got what they wanted. The top brass laid low, because they know that the agency can ruin their careers. The NCO's, "the backbone of the Army," didn't display much of their own, or else they enjoyed watching.

Twenty to one, the abuse started out with stuff no worse than the troops themselves endured in boot camp, Ranger school, or any other "character building" (read "stressful") military program.

Of course, there's a substantial difference between stress experienced by a volunteer and that suffered at the hands of enemy aliens.

Actually, you don't have to have been in service to understand either hazing or its natural evolution into serious abuse. Any fraternity, be it Skull & Bones or the Masons, subjects its initiates to demeaning treatment. Street gangs are doubtless even more brutal.

The thing that keeps most of us on our civil behavior is the Golden Rule. Even without it being enunciated, humans ask themselves the instinctive question, "What if that happened to me?" Sometimes we can tune out that question, and the more "realistic" we become, the longer those times can last.

Being comfortable with abusing others requires only two components: 1) having the victims distinguished in some way so they don't remind the abuser of himself, and 2) having the approval, either overt or implicit, of some authority for the abuse. It's not necessary to hate the victims, it's not necessary to have a lot of prior experience, and it's not necessary to be a "pervert" or a sadist.

Famous studies, including the Stanford and Milgram Experiments, demonstrate beyond doubt that ordinary people can be quite easily seduced into barbarism by their commanders; the government's "shock" at the "rogue" soldiers is disingenuous.

# June 2004

**Monthly Meeting** - 7:00pm, June 11<sup>th</sup> - Riley Towers, Main Building, 2nd floor, 650 N. Alabama, \$5.00 door charge, includes light buffet. "Watercolors and More" Well-known artist, Barbara Mangus Hopkins, will show us how it's done. Contact: Petra Ritchie, 786-8665.

**Dinner Before ...** Before Monthly Meeting, 5:30pm, June 11<sup>th</sup>, July 9<sup>th</sup> - The Elbow Room, 605 N. Pennsylvania (across North Street from the Federal Building). Contact: Alan Schmidt, 233-5190.

**Lunch Bunch:** 11:30am, June 4<sup>th</sup> and July 2<sup>nd</sup> - Scottish Rite Cathedral, 650 N. Meridian at North Street. Free parking in rear; enter from North Street. Come when you can, leave when you must. Contact: Nancy White, 632-4747.

**Carmel Ham & Eggs (Hamilton County Eggheads):** 9:30am, June 5<sup>th</sup> and July 3<sup>rd</sup> - Meet at the Barnes & Noble Booksellers on the west side of 146th and Meridian Streets. Contact: Dick Foltz, 299-3214.

**Bridge SIG:** 2:00pm, June 6<sup>th</sup>, Contact host, Grace Falvey and Bob Dill, 8119 Foxchase Drive. For general information or to reserve a seat, contact Grace Falvey, 842-6246.

**Kokomo Breakfast:** 10:00am, June 12<sup>th</sup>, June 26<sup>th</sup>, July 10<sup>th</sup> - Richard's Restaurant, east side of Highway 31, two blocks north of Center. Contact: Ken Kleist, 765-452-8268 (W) or 765-457-6975 (H).

**MIND Items Due:** June 10<sup>th</sup> - Contact George Dunn, 849-4869, PO Box 50946, Indianapolis, IN 46250.

**Calendar Items Due:** June 13<sup>th</sup> - Contact Tony Ware, 423-9533, email: jaware@lilly.com.

**MINDBending and ExCom Meeting:** 5:30pm, June 22<sup>nd</sup> - Russ and Shirley Washburne, 841 Kessler West Drive, Indianapolis, 253-1665.

---

MIND

page 6-7

## MEETING OF CENTRAL INDIANA MENSA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EXCOM)

**30 March, 2004**

Time: 7:45 p.m. at the Wendy's at 71st and Michigan Road

Present: Cyndi Kuyper, LocSec, presiding; Nancy White, Vice LocSec; Peggy Sargent, Treasurer; George Dunn, Recorder; Alan Schmidt, Russ Grunden. Also present: Petra Ritchie, Jud Horning.

Minutes approved as amended.

Treasurer's Report approved.

Russ reported that we couldn't get the MensaPhone on the "no call" list because we're considered a small business.

Channel 59 taped a Mensa test and gave us about 2 minutes of favorable publicity; Russ is trying to get a copy.

New Business

Tony Ware has not been attending ExCom meetings; under the ByLaws this means he has to be dropped from the ExCom. Peggy pointed out that this provision has been laxly enforced. Cyndi will call Tony and see if he wants to attend or would prefer to be replaced.

The Calendar has been showing up with discrepancies. George says he gets the Calendar too late to proof it. Is there some way to get an advance version to a member of the ExCom for checking?

We can reschedule the MINDBending at Peggy's Wednesday if we can get the MINDs back from the Washburnes' housewatchers that day. Otherwise, Peggy will need at least a day's notice. [*There was a snafu in arrangements and the MINDs got locked inside the house, presumably by the people watching the Washburnes' house while they're out of town.*]

Discussion of inviting the appointed officers (Membership Officer, Student Coordinator, etc.) to the ExCom meetings.

Discussion of buying a booth at Black Expo in July to recruit more African-American applicants. A booth would cost \$350; the consensus was against it.

Need someone to take over the website. We can link it to the National one.

adjourned 8:50

## George Dunn

### Breaking Up Is Not All That Hard To Do

Looking back over my life, I realized that I was apparently spared one of the dramatic crises of youth and adolescence, in that I never had to figure out how to break up with a romantic partner. According to the conventional wisdom of all the movies I've seen, this means I was spared the cost of several expensive meals and possibly escaped having several drinks thrown in my face.

Of course there's a downside to this absence of public humiliation: I didn't have to plan the breakup because I never had the option. As far as I can recall, it was always the female who broke up with me, and on further reflection, I don't believe I ever got a fancy meal out of it.

As a matter of fact, what I typically got was more of a "constructive breakup," in which she just stopped returning my messages and started seeing someone else. If I'd realized in time it was that easy, I might have tried it myself.

Ah, who am I kidding? The reason I never got to drop anybody was that I was always still interested while she was getting bored. Being boring is obviously a considerable sin, although its gradual nature doesn't call for throwing drinks in the face of the sinner. Nevertheless, being left unexpectedly is not without its pangs. Basic rejection is naturally the worst part, but the mystery gives things a certain spice. "What did I do wrong?" is the question but there's nothing quite so pitiful as actually asking it.

Yes, you would have to be an awfully sad sack to ask a woman why she didn't like you; I mean, that sounds so much like begging that no self-respecting male could possibly bring himself to do it. Besides, none of them ever gave me an honest answer.

There seems to be a Rule somewhere that says a woman can humiliate a man, crush his spirit and drive him into suicidal depression by her *actions*, but she can under no circumstances *say* anything that would "hurt his feelings" if that would result in giving him some useful information.

For example, while a man could make changes with data on the order of "You're too old / young / fat / poor / cheap / silly / serious / crude / snobbish / controlling / needy" or "I can't stand smoking / drinking / bad dancing / religious nuts / bald men / smelly feet / tractor pulls.," there's next to nothing he can do with, "Don't worry; I'm sure there's somebody out there just right for you."

Sure, nobody likes to give a reason that makes her look shallow and nobody likes to provide a position that seems open to argument ("Is that all? I can change!") but don't you think the breaker-upper ought to assume a modest risk, at least the equivalent of having to blot a margarita off your mug?

As for those who can relate emotionally to this experience, I can assure you that just like getting rabies shots, it gets easier with practice.

---

## Topic Primer

### *August: Collections*

There's a corvine bird called a magpie which is famous for snatching up shiny objects and bits of colorful cloth for its nest. These things serve no structural purpose, so why should the magpie collect them?

It's only a guess, but when I reflect that corvines (crows, ravens, rooks and magpies) are generally accounted the smartest of birds (far smarter than owls), I figure good brains just need aesthetic stimulation.

We also collect things we don't practically need. On one side, this tendency is the dark force of acquisition that rapes the world so we can have more than anybody else, but on a gentler facet, it can be a sort of art, if not an art of creation, then an art of assembly.

There's no utilitarian reason or moral imperative for acquiring book of coins or stamps, or shelves of ceramic pigs, or painted mushrooms or Adam Strange comics, it just provides the collectors with a good feeling.

Please write about some collecting that you did, or someone else's collection that you admire.

It doesn't need to be a particularly complete or exquisite collection and certainly not an expensive one. All that's needed to qualify is a degree of follow-up to a fondness for something other than money.

You could even consider such nonconventional "collections" as rejection letters, or ex-girlfriends. Try to tell us more about what your collection means to you than the technical details of how close you are to completing it or what we should look for should we decide to collect the same things. Of course, don't stop before telling us what the collectibles are.

It might also be nice to know what you consider the psychological impetus for collections. Are we actually trying to acquire something other than just so many tidbits of existence? Our childhoods? Power? Immortality?

Can collecting stuff be a bad thing, a destructive urge or compulsion, and if so, how do we determine when someone has crossed the line from amusement to obsession? Ought it matter how well catalogued the collection is?

Finally, how did we stop collecting -- assuming that we did? Did we complete the collection, move on to a better one, or just neglect it until we forgot about it?

advertisement

FOR SALE: Beautiful solid oak dining room table, 48" round (extends to 76") with very large pedestal. Five chairs. \$250. Call Treva Marks, 251-9075 between 9 am and 2 pm, Monday through Saturday.