



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

Craig Rullman
Columnist

Cognitive dissonance: A borderland variation

The idea that we can hold two disparate ideas in our heads at the same time and agree with them both — the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance — has rarely been so starkly illustrated for me as it was after a week on the U.S. southern border, with Sisters-based Warfighter Outfitters.

We did good work down there. And work of all kinds. There was physical labor, brush-clearing, trash-collecting, well-digging. There was psychological work. Brotherhood, friendships formed, healing, and an opportunity to share experiences. There was educational work: the hard job of collecting background information, asking the right questions, learning natural history, and eye-opening, on-the-ground, real-life experience and briefings from subject-matter experts. All of that is important.

But one thing that will keep resonating for me, long after the particular lessons

learned have been absorbed and filtered and faded into the background of my experiences, was the walk I took — escorted by Border Patrol agents who carried M4s with advanced optics and eyed every bush, every fold in the ground warily — following a simple path, lined with stones, through the saltbush and sand and rocks into a slight depression, a dry wash, not 50 yards from the pedestrian fence on the border.

You can't see it from the road. You can't see it from 15 feet in any direction. It's screened by thorny brush and palo verde, but when you make the corner there it is: a simple cross memorial with a fading parade flag, erected for Kris Eggle.

Kris was 28 when he was murdered in the sand. At the precise spot where his memorial now sits, in all of its simple humility.

From Cadillac, Michigan, Kris was an Eagle Scout, a member of the National Honor Society, and valedictorian of his high school class. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in wildlife biology. Then he became a Park Ranger, studying boats and bears at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Sleeping Bear Dunes, Canyonlands, and eventually Oregon Pipe Cactus. He was also an EMT, a member of Search and Rescue, and a qualified wildland and structural firefighter.

That's who Kris Eggle was: a giver. A believer in things larger than himself.

He was killed by people

who traffic in narcotics and human beings, who had just finished murdering people on the Mexican side of the border at the behest of their bosses, people who buy zebras and giraffes and tigers and put them in their backyards as symbols of wealth.

By people who traffic in death, whose employees worship death, and believe in nothing beyond death.

Think I'm kidding? I know it is true because I have kicked dozens of doors, serving felony narcotics warrants, engaged in violent confrontations with the occupants, and discovered rooms with altars to Santa Muerte, La Madrina, the patron saint of death, terrifying skeletal statues complete with burning candles, offerings of food, money, and dope. And not just once. Many times.

The people who killed Kris Eggle, who even as you read this are leading groups into remote desert lay-off sites, or raping them in some canyon wash, or robbing them four days into the Arizona desert, with 14 more to go, get nothing from me. I have no use for them at all. They contribute nothing but misery, grief, and destruction. They are a menace and a disease, and where our side of the border is complicit, where we fail to make the choice to stop being a market, or coddle their criminality, we are equally despicable.

And still, I have enormous sympathy for those people who, out of desperation, out of a situation so thoroughly corrupt and without hope, so utterly deprived of realistic



PHOTO BY CRAIG RULLMAN

A memorial in the desert to fallen Park Ranger Kris Eggle.

alternative, would risk their lives and the lives of their families to come here on the dream of a better life.

I would.

What wouldn't you do to ensure a better life for your children, or your grandchildren?

Given a similar set of circumstances, amounting to a life of perpetual serfdom in an entirely corrupt kingdom, where the rulers and their court worship death statues and criminal saints like Jesus Malverde, there is nothing I would not do, nor any number of any country's laws that I would not break, on the slimmest hope of escaping, of giving my family a better life: that is, any life outside of eternal servitude and slavery to corruption.

So it's possible, this dissonance, even for one who once made a career enforcing the law. But its hard, too; gritty and brackish, and dry like the sand. It carries sticky thorns, with barbs impossible to remove, it's venomous, it's

sharply angled and slippery like the cliff walls and sheer, rugged, passes of Organ Pipe.

When I reached the memorial, alone with my respectful Border Patrol escorts, who stood behind me, I said a few words for Kris, for his memory, and for the ultimate sacrifice he made in a desperate stand against those evil beings who would enslave us all for their private zoos, who count their money by weighing it, and who would murder benevolence forever, if they could.

And I'll say it one more time, in public. Thank you, Kris Eggle, and Godspeed.

There will be a celebration of life for Harold and Jean O'Hara, Saturday, April 9, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Sisters Community Church. *Everyone is welcome.*

DIXIE'S
PREMIUM WESTERN APPAREL
541-549-6451 • www.shopdixies.com
100 E. Cascade Ave., Sisters

Hope for a child. Change for a nation.

HOPE

\$37 a month.
All the difference in the world.
Sponsor a Ugandan child with a local organization at
HopeAfricaKids.com

This ad sponsored by The Nugget Newspaper.

RAISED

VAST

CELEBRATE EASTER WITH VAST CHURCH

VAST CHURCH MEETS AT 9:30 AM AT SISTERS HIGH SCHOOL
KIDS CLASSES AVAILABLE FOR NURSERY THROUGH 8TH GRADE
VASTCHURCH.COM