

OTHER VIEWS

# Until Black lives matter

My husband and I have a yard sign that states, among other things, that “BLACK LIVES MATTER.” Several of our neighbors have reacted as if that must mean that other lives — “all lives” or “blue lives” — aren’t important. They’ve asked: “Don’t all lives matter?”



**ANNE MORRISON**  
LA GRANDE

Of course all lives matter. But in our country, the

idea that Black lives matter hasn’t exactly been a given.

The first enslaved Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619, starting a slave trade that continued, in the U.S., until 1808. It’s estimated more than 10 million Africans were torn from their homes and families, raped, branded, traded, sold and transported to the Americas to be brutally enslaved and treated as property. In our country, that system lasted almost 250 years. Clearly the lives of Africans and their descendants did not “matter” in the way white lives did.

Slavery in the U.S. ended in 1865, but Southerners reacted violently to new laws, which enabled former slaves to vote and hold office. Between 1865 and 1950, an estimated 6,500 Black Americans were lynched — women, children, babies, but mostly men, sometimes before crowds of thousands, sometimes after unimaginable torture. The people who committed lynchings were often publicly known, but rarely held accountable. That history tells us that Black lives did not “matter” in the way white lives did.

Millions of Black people fled the poverty, violence and segregation of the South to face discrimination in employment, education and housing throughout the country. Old news clips show the brutal force used, often by the police, to subdue civil rights workers in the South. (It’s telling that when authorities dragged the lakes and rivers of central Mississippi in 1964 in the attempt to find the bodies of three civil rights workers murdered by the Klan and the police, they unexpectedly found, instead, the bodies of seven murdered Black men.) This is our heritage. And none of it suggests that our country has valued Black lives very much.

For more than a decade now, Americans have watched cellphone videos of Black Americans being assaulted and murdered by the police. The fact those murders keep happening, and the officers involved are so rarely held accountable, makes it difficult to believe this country really believes Black lives matter in the same way as white lives.

Yes, all lives matter. Of course blue lives matter. But neither law enforcement officers nor most whites come from an older-than-the-nation-and-still-existing tradition of oppression and violence that says our lives are worth less than other people’s. History and the nightly news show we have never and don’t now value Black lives as we do white lives.

The assertion that Black Lives Matter hardly means that others lives don’t. Instead, it recognizes our centuries of history, where Black lives have not mattered as much as other people’s. It articulates the reality that we need for people from all backgrounds to work toward a fairer world — where Black lives are valued equally.

**About the Author**

Anne Morrison is a La Grande resident and retired attorney who has lived in Union County since 2000.



MY VOICE

# What would a Navy Seal do at this point?

If you live in rural America, by design and by default, you have to be tough. Carrying a gun for protection often comes with that. The same mantra as a Navy Seal?

I live in the city and rural America — Austin, Texas, and La Grande. In the city, the grocery stores don’t let you in without a mask.

Tired of that, I returned from Austin about a week ago. Refreshing to see faces because you don’t have to wear a mask. But should you?

As I watch most without a mask I am reminded of my many years of intrigue and research with U.S. Special Forces and the traits it takes to be one of the toughest men in the world. In La Grande, I have been able to identify those same traits in many people: calm, tough, rugged, shoot it if it moves, respectful, and the nicest people you’ll ever meet. In one word: “humble.”

Follow me here as I share a story of those Special Forces traits, how it relates to the toughest of the tough, to COVID-19 and to Union County.

Three Navy Seal trainees, one by one, are put into a large room with a circle in the middle. The trainee’s job is to escape the room via one of three exits. However, each exit is guarded by two hardened Navy Seals. The circle

represents a safe zone the other Navy Seals are not allowed to enter. This gives the Seal trainee time to think through an escape to freedom, and to fight another day. Once they leave the circle, they have 30 seconds to escape.

After 10 minutes of analyzing the situation, trainee one heads to door three. He does not get past the Seals in 30 seconds.

The second trainee sits in the circle for an hour analyzing every angle. He bolts for door one, and after 20 seconds he cannot escape. But, before the 30 seconds expires, he returns to the circle. Smart move. After four attempts though the class instructor says, “Great try. You died four times.”

The third trainee is a burly guy (no pun intended). After two hours in the circle, he is asked by the instructor what he plans to do. He says he is waiting for the Seals to get bored or fall asleep. The instructor says, “Good luck with that.”

Three more hours pass and the Seal instructor informs the trainee that he has one more hour to escape or the exercise will end. The Seals guarding the doors begin harassing and challenging the trainee. Forty-five minutes later, the instructor, with 15 minutes left, tells the trainee he gets a weekend

pass if he can escape. Ah, an incentive! What does trainee three do? He does nothing.

As they gather in the center of the room the instructor facing trainee three says, “Say goodbye to your former team members. Only the toughest survive.” Then he turns to trainee one and trainee two and dismisses them.

The moral of the story? Navy Seals are first taught to avoid danger, complete the mission safely, and to live another day. Since the circle represented a safe zone, trainee three’s best strategy was to do nothing. Attempting to go where there is danger is a last resort move.

In dealing with COVID-19 a Navy Seal weighs the risks. He realizes injecting disinfectant and taking unproven hydroxychloroquine are both very risky. He also ignores conspiracy theories because they don’t further the mission and are a waste of energy. He knows his gun is useless too. He therefore takes COVID-19 as a relevant and serious risk.

To remain the toughest guy he knows his best strategy today is to ensure he is available another day to serve his country, his community and his family. Which means the toughest guy in town is wearing a mask.

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