

# THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN

INTERVIEWS BY  
MICHAEL McCUSKER

*'You don't have to be Irish to know the world is going to break your heart.'*

~Daniel Patrick Moynihan responding to the assassination of John F. Kennedy, November 22, 1963

The September 11 catastrophe has prompted the question:

**How has the attack on the USA affected you and what do you think the nation's response should be?**

The question was asked primarily of Oregon coastal folk --- although not entirely --- most of whom are Astoria residents, but not all.

A number of those asked had mixed feelings and admitted they were too confused to answer concisely and declined. A few others also declined because they thought their responses might be too unpopular or be considered "unpatriotic."

Most who were asked responded before the air assault on Afghanistan began on Sunday, October 7.

## RICHARD GOOSEY

Of course terrorism doesn't make sense or there wouldn't be terrorism. There is no terror in what you can understand.

As far as what to do about it --- you can't invade people's countries to get rogues. I think some of these terrorists are our very own.

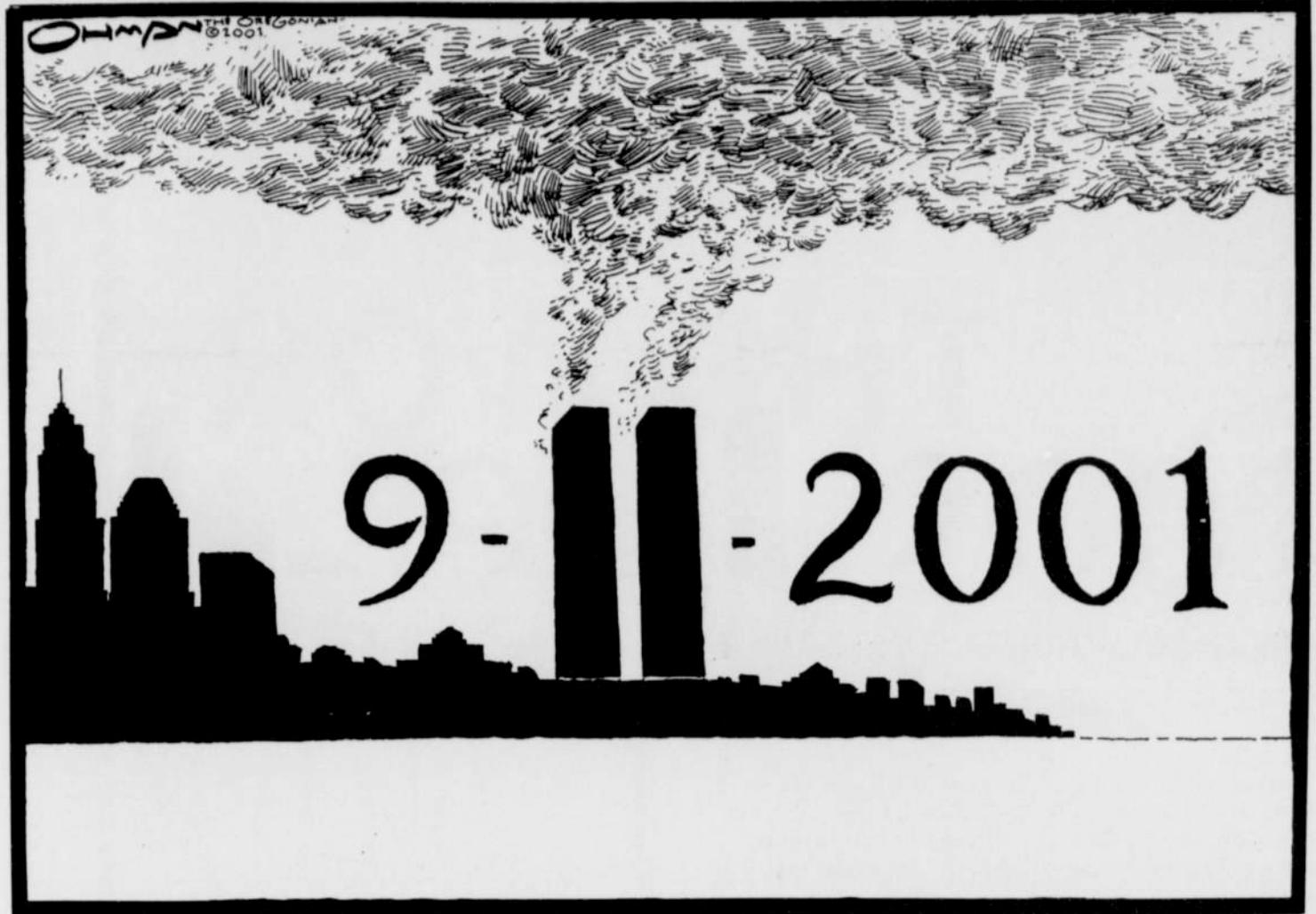
I suppose ultimately the answer to defeat terrorism is intelligence, in all senses of that word.

## JOHN WEDELL

Terrorism is an irrational and destructive act. Nonetheless, such destruction might suit the cause of nihilism, or deemed an act of revenge. It is still destructive, but it suits a cause, revenge --- or it's causeless, which is nihilism. It's not to excuse, but it has its own justification.

Nihilism has no justification. Revenge has a cause --- an eye for an eye. In Islam you are allowed to ask for an eye for an eye. Such an act is Koranic doctrine and can be forgiven. A life for a life can be forgiven with communal service.

It's not something you want to encourage or condone, but it is a defacto fact of life.



JACK OHMAN (THE OREGONIAN)

## JESSI DUNKIN

First thing I thought (when the terrorists struck the World Trade Center) was, "We are going to war."

This is a wakeup call for the country. We're not invincible, much as we like to think we are. It's going to be a long war.

## BRANDON HERNANDEZ

I thought this is really going to stink. I would hate to just become President and have this happen. I thought there would be a serious racial backlash, which has happened, but not as much as I thought.

I think if they hadn't broadcast caution against discrimination it would have been horrible.

I don't think there will be a draft. Bush said there won't be. It's either going to be a small war like the Persian Gulf War or it will be World War 3 and our faces will all melt off.

## SHARON KLAUSER

If we didn't realize before that this was going to happen, we've closed our eyes to what's been going on the better part of forever.

How we come off to other countries is that we are arrogant and unfeeling. If you've been to other countries you feel ashamed as to how we treat them. We feel we're ascendant and it's hard for people in other countries to see us as individuals with feelings, warmth and intelligence when we've done things so shameful and embarrassing as a group.

What's going to happen, I don't know. It's pretty scary. It feels like an internal enemy where before it seemed external. Now it's from our very heart and our own people as the weapon.

I think we will feel more suspicion and have less freedom because of it. I feel it could be used as a way to take more of our rights away. Where do you draw the line between rights? We were built on the concept of individual rights; now it looks like we're going to be herded around like a bunch of sheep.

I don't know what's going to happen to our children and grandchildren. I hope they are smarter than we've been.

## LEE MILLER

I am concerned about going to war without a declaration of war from Congress.

I am concerned about knowing our enemy. I want to know exactly who they are. I want to know their histories. I want to know what they think. And I think it should be made public to whoever wants to know it.

If we are going to pursue this public action we must know our enemy.

If we ever conclude this violence, I am concerned that our civil rights go back to what they were before September 11, although they've gone to hell since the 1960s. Probable cause is whatever the police say it is and they don't have to prove anything.

# DANCING WITH DEATH

*Perpetual war for perpetual peace.*

~GEORGE ORWELL (1984)

Mornings are the best time for those of us who relish awakenings. Billy Collins, America's Poet Laureate, describes his mornings in a new book of poems called *Sailing Alone Around The Room*. Espresso. Music. Thoughts. Dawn sky. Energy. A time to read a bit before getting ready for the day ahead.

My morning of September 11, 2001 was quite like that. I opened, as I drank my cup of tea, KMUN classical music floating about, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, which somehow in life I'd missed. The complete title is *Slaughterhouse Five Or The Children's Crusade, A Duty Dance With Death*. The subtitle under Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s name reads: "A fourth-generation German-American now living in easy circumstances on Cape Cod (and smoking too much), who as an American Infantry Scout Hors de Combat, as a prisoner of war, witnessed the fire-bombings of Dresden, Germany, 'The Florence of the Elbe', a long time ago, and survived to tell the tale. This is a novel somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from. Peace."

I'm not really a fan of science fiction, so the Tralfamadorian flying saucers sort of put me off (I have better stuff than this to read, I thought). Nevertheless, I delved in, and had just arrived at the part where Vonnegut tells Harrison Starr, a movie-maker, that he is writing an antiwar book. Harrison's response was, "Why don't you write an anti-glacier book instead?" Vonnegut says that what he meant, of course, was that there would always be wars, that they are as easy to stop as glaciers. "And even if wars didn't keep coming like glaciers, there would still be plain old death."

As I say, I was just reading that part when the music was interrupted by the broadcast that will never be forgotten in our lifetimes. Suddenly, it seemed the whole world was blowing up as sheer horror beyond imagination was being described over the airwaves. On CNN the sight of those airliners packed with people smashing into the Twin Towers was so horrific, it could only be compared to the complete destruction of the city of Dresden, Germany in 1945 by the Allied Forces (us) just as the war was winding down.

I hadn't even reached the part in Vonnegut where Dresden became one huge flame from the furious blast of the high-explosive bombs our Air Force dropped. We fried the place. About 130,000 people died that night. It was the most despicable destruction of a city in modern warfare so far, and it was of no strategic value to America. Exquisite as a painted porcelain teacup, it must have offended someone in command, because our forces totally leveled the city. The only survivors were Vonnegut and a few other POWs who were kept in the basement of a slaughterhouse that served as a prison during the last days of World War 2. Though that bombing has largely

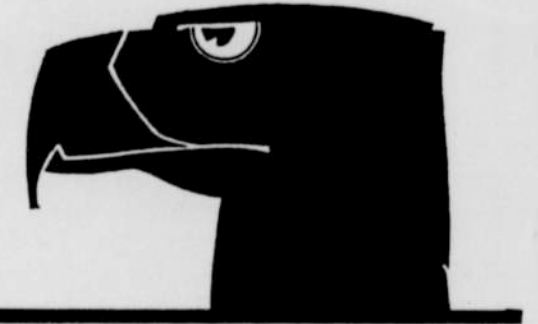
been forgotten or never known about by younger generations, Vonnegut expresses his outrage at the senseless destruction of life and property decades after the event.

We had beaten the Germans. We bombed them back to the Stone Age. Europe was one great ruin and what population was left was starving and shelterless. Ragtag groups of POWs were being exchanged. The "mopping up" had begun. We had won the war after years of brutal fighting and we were victorious.

Did we bomb Dresden for revenge? Did we hate them for their elegant lifestyle, their wealth and maybe consequent smugness? Perhaps their sense of security in not being touched by the violence that had been a condition of life throughout Europe the first half of the 20th century? Did we, that night, establish the model by which warfare would be conducted for the rest of the 20th and into the 21st century? We certainly didn't stop with Dresden. It wasn't enough for us, obviously. From our safe haven here in America we have waged acts of war against others, the likes of which would make God roll over in his grave. There isn't a country in the world that has guaranteed safety from our firepower when our mind is set on destruction. We have demonstrated time and time again that we are entitled to call the shots, that we are the rulers of the New World Order, and that we will decide, under our own conditions, who will be favored and who will be destroyed. Starr's statement that war is inevitable, and therefore futile to protest against, looks like a hard cold fact. Other than the commodities and comforts this century brings us, we are still, nevertheless, primitives who practice ritual sacrifice of our young males periodically in order to maintain a psychic safety level. Hence the "Children's Crusades" subtitle of *Slaughterhouse Five*. The Tralfamadorians in Vonnegut's book were fascinated with the humans of Planet Earth and abducted them occasionally to put in their museums. They also took really good care of the humans, giving them all they needed. Their planet was peaceful and everyone had enough.

When I faced a classroom of High School students on the morning of September 11, I had no words to express what I saw happening; once again. Sacrificial lambs. Just awakening. Then the voice of Astoria High School Principal Larry Lockett came over the intercom with a promise to make a statement within the hour. True to his word he gave a response that I wish the President could have given. He spoke eloquently of our need now to make this a better world through the elimination of hate for anyone, for to hate is to be a terrorist. He said, "In our free society where so much is taken for granted and where we have so many gifts it is hard for us to comprehend how some could hate so much to take their own lives and the lives of others at the same time. In many places around the world this is the way life is lived every day. For us the feeling is almost incomprehensible." As he spoke I almost wondered if he had been to Tralfamadore, but I hadn't got to that part of the book yet.

~KAREN MELLIN



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