

supreme, but the joke's on us and the blood still on our hands until we manage to reflect equally the nurture side of nature throughout our systems of politics, religion, education, economics, law and government.

NANCY MONTGOMERY

I feel like I'm learning more about the subversion and hidden agendas of our government than ever before — the secrets kept from us, the information buried and manipulated. And it's scary. I feel like a dupe.

The American people are dupes. We placed so much trust in our government, so we don't know how to think or watch. And we don't.

Those who do think or watch are looked upon with disdain and implicitly regarded as unpatriotic because they are rocking an already sinking boat and say nobody can be complacent, but people don't like that. They want to believe that Bush believes in God and is doing the right thing rather than worrying he is a puppet for Dick Cheney and the corporations. They don't want to know he is a highly paid figurehead.

I am kind of stunned that the stuff I hear doesn't make the front page news or TV — stuff that never comes out because it's not tasteful, happy or the corporate party-line.

My dad says there must be a reason for Iraq. He doesn't buy the reasons he hears but he's sure one will come along that makes sense to him.

And I asked him, "Why do you believe that. Why do you trust it?"

He said he didn't know.

That's what gets me. This blind trust. Why don't we believe the Bushies base their policies on dark motives? That power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. But people don't want to believe that.

ELIZABETH MENETREY

In my younger days — a couple of weeks ago — I was so agitated about Iraq that I decided the Bush administration was evil. But now, after this process I've gone through, I realize they are businessmen, with no foresight, wisdom or compassion. They have no deep insights or thoughts except profit. They don't think of children or the future, or of the coming generations.

We expect our elders and leaders to think about these things. Perhaps these businessmen think Armageddon is close and they don't care about the future. But their lack of thought about it is deeply shocking.

I think the media are doing an astonishingly poor job of letting people know about what is going on. I thought it was bad when Reagan was President, but it's worse now.

One of the jobs of a community radio station (*She is program director of KMUN-FM*) is to give people information and help them reach out to each other. People need to feel empowered, that they are not alone, that there are many others like them who feel very strongly about what is going on in this country, as education, care for our elderly and environmental protections are being demolished.

I am hoping that more and more people will come out of their numbness and feeling of being overwhelmed by the events of 9/11.

RICHARD JOHNSON

Your desire to interview me and get my thoughts on the current status of things in Iraq, has stirred up in me a level of 'grappling' I've not experienced in quite some time.

I backed away from being quoted by you because often my initial responses to questions in such moments may not fully or even wisely address the issue. Certainly I wouldn't care to be presented in print in any other than my true mind. So I deferred with the promise of getting back to you.

Well, after considerable thought applied to your question, I am frankly unable to form an opinion regarding the business of the U.S. occupation in Iraq and the status of things there. And I must resist the strong temptation to flail about with things I may think about it, when in fact I know so little of the truth.

What I do know, however, is I am exceedingly unsure, even distrustful of this administration which seems to me to be further opposite in spirit, style and position than my own sensibilities and what I hope is good judgment, than most other administrations in my memory.

There appears to be a huge lack of honesty, integrity, forthrightness and credibility in our international dealings. There seems to be a good amount of impropriety and misdeeds, and plain wrongheadedness that's gone on, garnering tremendous disrespect and opposition around the world. I find this deeply disturbing. And I'm sure our diplomats and leaders have been very guilty of double-dealing and betrayal which I know undermines support and goodwill. After all, we are all human, and when we behave poorly individually or as a nation, there is always a cost.

I fear the U.S., in spite of all the good and greatness we are about, is behaving rather poorly all too often, with illegitimate agendas, and we're seeing backlash to this all the time. It seems to me we are not going to the heart of many matters with wisdom and prudence. I frankly question our intentions, certainly our methods.

And to have so much of who we are as a nation steeped so much in militarism, with the huge dominant ethos of capitalistic corporatism, seems to doom our good old USA to



FRANCES JETTER

a fate I shudder to contemplate. This truly defies my personal sensibilities. The precedents being set, the conditions being created are extremely unsettling to me. And when one considers the enormous amount of money and power behind all this, it leaves me mentally paralyzed when I think about it. I struggle every day to loosen my cynicism, set aside my displeasure, and somehow try and keep a sense of optimism and be of good cheer in the face of so much that seems so wrong.

My gut, my instincts, the facts as I know them in a limited way, all point to a general set of conditions I am horribly pessimistic about to the core of my being. Do I have any intelligent opinions about Iraq and the status of our occupation there? I'm afraid not.

If the question were asked, 'Are we as a nation running amok?' I would have to say it sure seems so. What can we as citizens do about it? In the short term, maybe changing administrations in November 2004 would be a good start. From there, maybe a better informed, more proactive citizenry could produce change for the better. Maybe too, we need to reinvigorate our collective understanding and commitment to fairness, truth, liberty and justice for all, in this home of the brave and land of the free. We may also want to become better students of history, so we may exercise better judgment in the present.

PATRICIA LONGNECKER

I think I have more questions than answers since we are in Iraq to glean more than repair.

It's no different now than when the whole thing started. We don't know any more than we did before.

We know it's all about oil and who can make the most money. It won't be the American people, and it won't be the Iraqi people.

The war in Iraq was wrong but I'm still in flux because I don't know the truth. I was against the war before it began and I'm against it now.

Remember Bishop James Pike? He said that when he read in the newspapers how many American soldiers were killed, and how many Vietnamese soldiers, it was just so many people who died. It's like driving past a traffic accident. It doesn't mean anything unless it's somebody you know. Otherwise it's just a statistic.

I live just up the street from the Astoria east mooring basin and for years I have grown to live with the sea lions. From early on, my family dubbed them "the Republicans of the sea." The reason is that they take one bite out of each fish and leave the rest to rot.

But I must ask all you fishermen, isn't our present government doing the same as the sea lions? Taking one big bite out of each of us to fund themselves and leaving the rest to rot. We are facing a dire and difficult situation. We must find a way to solve this debacle.

CHRISTOPHER GRANT

If or when I have grandchildren and someday perhaps at junior high age one would ask me what happened or why we went to war on Iraq — and mind you the elder and junior Bushes' agendas at that point will seem synonymous — I will be compelled to explain something complicated in simple terms:

"Because they could and get away with it, and there was a profit in it for the people who had the power."

By then this might make sense in a country where being on top will long have erased any notions of reasonable or justifiable cause for war on moral or defensive grounds.

STEPHANIE STERN

What do I know about the war in Iraq, or any war? I am 23 and live in the utopia of Astoria. My generation's only connection with war is TV and we relate it back to Hollywood.

My very first day as a TV reporter was 9/11, and I watched it on television. I didn't have any emotion, nothing to connect it with. It was like watching a movie. It wasn't until I went to Ground Zero that I was able to connect and understand people's lives were drastically changed. Before that it was just a TV program.

It's not that I'm uneducated or not schooled in history. It's just that what we're taught is so watered down I'm not prepared to reach or connect.

I have been paying much more attention to the Middle East, to people in the background instead of the people the cameras film running around with guns. I see that they wear the same kind of clothes I wear and that's a fact that makes it a little more realistic. We shop at the same stores, but when I leave the store I go to my Mazda. When they leave the store they dodge shrapnel. In the shadows our lives are not much different.

I feel the government hides things from us. It might be to our benefit; some things we should know and some things we shouldn't in regard to our safety. I have difficulties coming to a decision because I don't know enough because of this lack of information.

So I pray for the safety of all those involved — the Iraqis, the Americans, and everyone else — that they have enough information to be safe as we all go through this ordeal.

JO ANN HALVERSON

Anyone would be obtuse if they didn't know by now the real reasons for the war in Iraq.

It reminds me of when I was a teenager and my mother said I couldn't go out with a bunch of boys but it was okay if I went with the girls. So the girls would come and get me and I would go off with the boys. The war in Iraq is exactly that kind of deception.

Does the rest of the world respect us more for what we've done in Iraq?

Are we safer now?

AFTER WAR

Here, over bloodstained
craggy barren soil
the tattered banner waves,
high above the final
battlegrounds,
where hundreds slaughtered lie
in eternal sleep,
their blood tinting the dirt.

The banner flies
held up by the wind
witness to desolation
until time itself
tears the fabric remnants
from the pole
and everything crumbles
to dust.

~MARGIT BOWLER

Margit Bowler is 14 on August 9. She wrote this poem two years ago, and it appeared in the July 2001 NCTE.

Bikes & Beyond
1089 MARINE DR.
ASTORIA, OREGON

BUCK'S BOOK BARN
★ USED BOOKS & RECORDS ★ 738-4246
1023 BROADWAY • SEASIDE

Fulio's
pastaria

"The best Italian restaurant between San Francisco & Seattle."
~JONATHAN NICHOLS, THE OREGONIAN
"The best Italian restaurant in Astoria, ever!"
~RICHARD FENCSAK, THE DAILY ASTORIAN

1149 COMMERCIAL, ASTORIA (503) 325-9001