

# 'I WASH MY HANDS OF IT'

WORDS & ART BY IRIS SULLIVAN DAIRE

*Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people*  
 ~MARTIN LUTHER KING Jr.

I've been thinking about violence and how it manifests in my life, in the large scale wars and in many small ways such as raising my voice at my sons. I've noticed that the more over stimulated I am, the less I am able to think clearly and act consciously. Clinging to fear and anger makes it difficult to maintain compassion. This leads to enemy images which enable violence.

There is much of concern happening in the world just now. Many of us are so overwhelmed by it that we have shut down. Some of us are so busy surviving that we do not take action against any of the injustices that we see. Some wait for God to solve problems.

"I wash my hands of it!"

This is used as a statement to declare non-responsibility of a person, act or situation — But I've always wondered is it that easy? Can we rid ourselves of our responsibilities without losing power? And what happens to the things/people we turn our backs on? There are many sayings about washing your hands with and without success. They say a person responsible for someone's death can "never wash their hands of it." And yet the gospel songs ask "are you washed in the blood of the lamb?" Certain blood stains, and certain blood cleanses? Do our choices determine which is which?

When we "wash our hands" of our own responsibility to address injustice, we also wash our hands of the hope that taking action offers. We wash our hands of meaning and connection in our lives, and we support that which we abhor. This project offers up these things: our concerns about our nation; our relations with each other; and our work concerns.

I like using these towel boxes because they represent to me a very worker based, practical ascetics; where the average person dries their hands. They also refer to public restrooms — the domain of graffiti — sometimes the voice of the nameless who work for change; sometimes a place for public declarations of emotion.

These towels hold a bunch of questions and concerns in my community. I asked people what they worry about — I could easily have asked twice as many questions. I would have liked to have another entire towel box related to the environment (the state of the biosphere is so intertwined in everything).

I believe asking questions will lead to solutions. So question authority. Question yourself, your family, your neighbors — even when it may bring up differences; especially then.

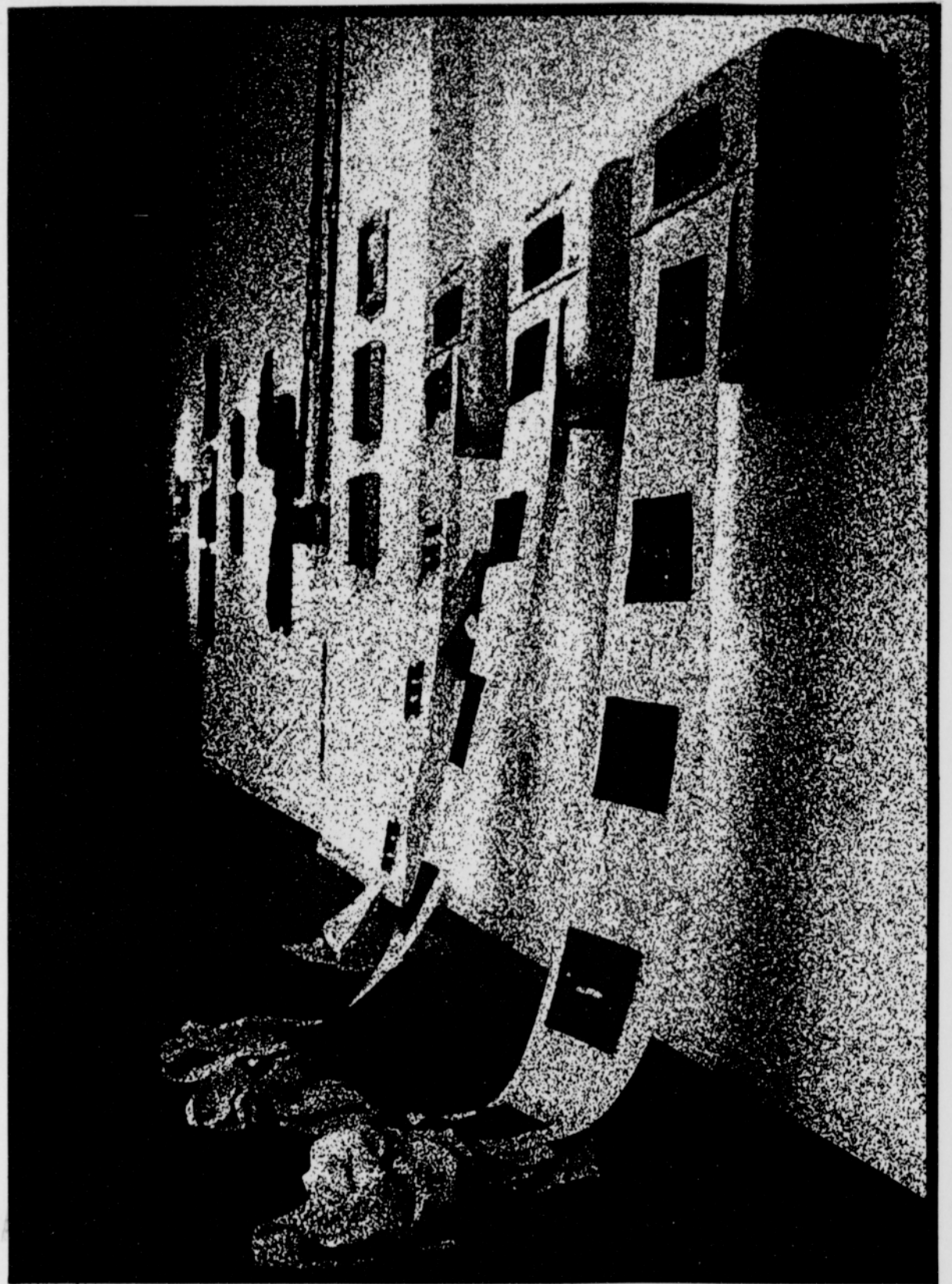
What are we abdicating our authority on? Who are we giving our power to? What are the priorities we hold to be most life serving, and do those who hold the privilege of leadership have the same or a similar priority list? Who has what to gain by public policies enacted in our name? How do we respond to policies/laws that are inconsistent to our ethics?

Nonresponse, to "wash our hands of it" is to support. We are powerful enough to enact change if we own up to our own power.

My hope is that we might set aside our apathy and take heart. We are more powerful than we know.

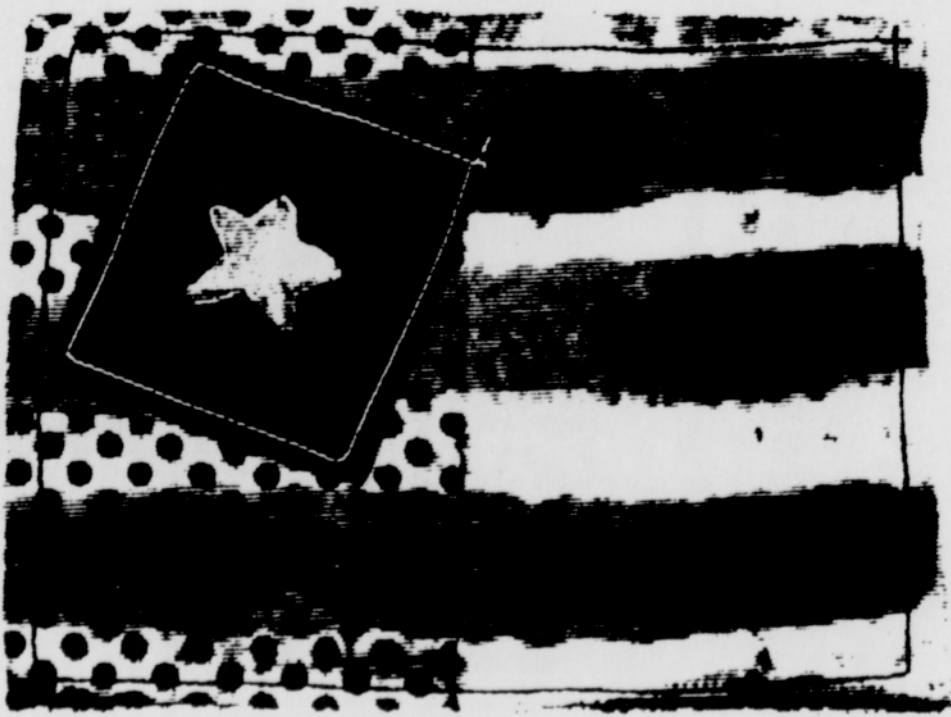
My gratitude to those who shared their concerns with me: Lisa, Kathleen, Youngjee, Bran, Kris, Mary, Theresa, Chris, Sharyn, Cathy, Audrey, McLaren, Carla, Amy, Greg, and my husband Joe.

This work is dedicated in support of the United Nations "International Decade for a Culture of Peace for the Children of the World" (2001-2010).



PHOTOGRAPH AT AVA BY JOE GARRISON

*Iris Sullivan Daire is an Astoria artist and KMUN-FM volunteer broadcaster. She is a member of Bread Peddlers Collective and proprietor of 'Dream Bird Studio'. "I make baby slings and natural dye textiles," she says. She and her husband Joe Garrison have two sons, Sam and Martin. Her towel boxes were recently on display at Astoria Visual Arts.*



## NATION

Na'-tion (Na'shen) [of *nasci*, to be born] 1. A stable historically developed community of people with a territory, economic life, culture, and language in common. 2. The people of a territory united under a single government; country. 3. A people or tribe.

(indigo bound resist, cochineal/lac dye, textile ink on cotton sheeting, shop towel)

1. Does environmental degradation effect national security?
2. Do you want military recruiters talking to your five year old?
3. Does media consolidation benefit democracy?
4. What is the root cause of violence?
5. Is water a right or a product?
6. True or false: the role of the government is to manage the collective resources of the nation to ensure fulfillment of basic needs and liberty for all.

7. Fair taxation with representation? (Tea anyone?)
8. What does it mean to be free?
9. Does running prisons for a profit strike you as unethical?
10. Who does government belong to?
11. Is it just use of Presidential power to indefinitely detain individuals without giving them access to counsel or due process of law?
12. How important are civil liberties?
13. If taxes represent our combined wealth, who decides how it is best spent?
14. What election process best fosters honesty in elected leaders?
15. Can violence resolve conflict?
16. Fascism: a system of government characterized by dictatorship, suppression of opposition, belligerent nationalism and racism, glorification of war, etc.: sound familiar?
17. Public lands are held in trust for future generations, with the understanding that ecosystems will be maintained intact. Is this happening?
18. No God, no peace. Which God?
19. If one-third of the global military budget could be used to implement solutions to: global warming, convert to renewable energy, end deforestation, stop soil erosion, remove land-mines, provide shelter to all, provide safe water, eliminate nuclear weapons, provide health care to all, end hunger + malnutrition... Would it be worth it?
20. Who are the beneficiaries of your tax dollars?
21. If government stops being responsive to the populace, how should the people respond?