

An Eye Toward the Positive

Small ways to make a difference.

Every day the evening news reports violent divides between peoples, between religions, between countries, yet rarely takes note of human kindness. The news deliberately exploits the juice of human experience, stimulates fear – hoping we'll watch more news. As fear increases, so do our feelings of being different, or marginalized.

I do not suggest we should avoid the news, or ignore what we must face and when we must act – in our own families, communities, and country. I am suggesting an ideal that Hazrat Inayat Khan calls "overlooking," (Volume VIII, *Sufi Teachings*, page 241) a practice of noticing unkind behavior, yet still choosing to put our attention on what is loving. When your friend snaps at you, instead of focusing on her irritation, concentrate more deeply, see straight into the goodness in her heart, and respond to that. When a television newscaster reports a car bombing, instead of focusing on the twisted wreckage, broaden your vision to include the periphery: Some people close by shield children, while others run to help the injured. Amidst the tragedy and in greater measure, courage and compassion stand beside the violence.



Many people in Eugene are striving to look past what divides, toward a deeper kind of inclusion. The interfaith circle thrives; more than 37 different faith traditions in our community participate. New kinds of cooperative discussions are opening up.

The interfaith community provides a one-hour prayer service the 11th of every month at First Christian Church. The services are aired on Community Television. Every month, there is a pot-luck dinner and time to share extended ideas on the prayer service theme. The monthly brown-bag Two Rivers Interfaith Ministries (TRIM) meeting and forum – which oversees all the activities – meets the second Wednesday for 10 months of the year. TRIM has a Faith in Action sub-committee for those committed to social justice activism. Articles like this one are printed regularly in local newspapers. Once a month, two local bookstores host a panel from a different faith tradition.

Each of these events provides important service – building trust and friendship between disparate people who have discovered, over time, that our faiths are different, but we are much more alike than we realized. The ground is the same: We all look toward spiritual understanding seeking answers for the complex questions that plague us, we pray or meditate in one style or another, and we look for the best in one another.

For me, it is not the individual tradition's offerings that are the greatest draw; instead, I am thrilled to experience people of different faiths gathered together in an interested, cooperative atmosphere. We have had to also practice overlooking with each other. If offense has been taken, we have long-term willingness, commitment, and the respect and love for one another to listen and dialogue until understanding is reached.

Because these quiet activities are not reported on national news, collectively we remain unaware of the resulting positive shifts. What would happen if people focused on cohesive behavior, on what is going *right* in our world?

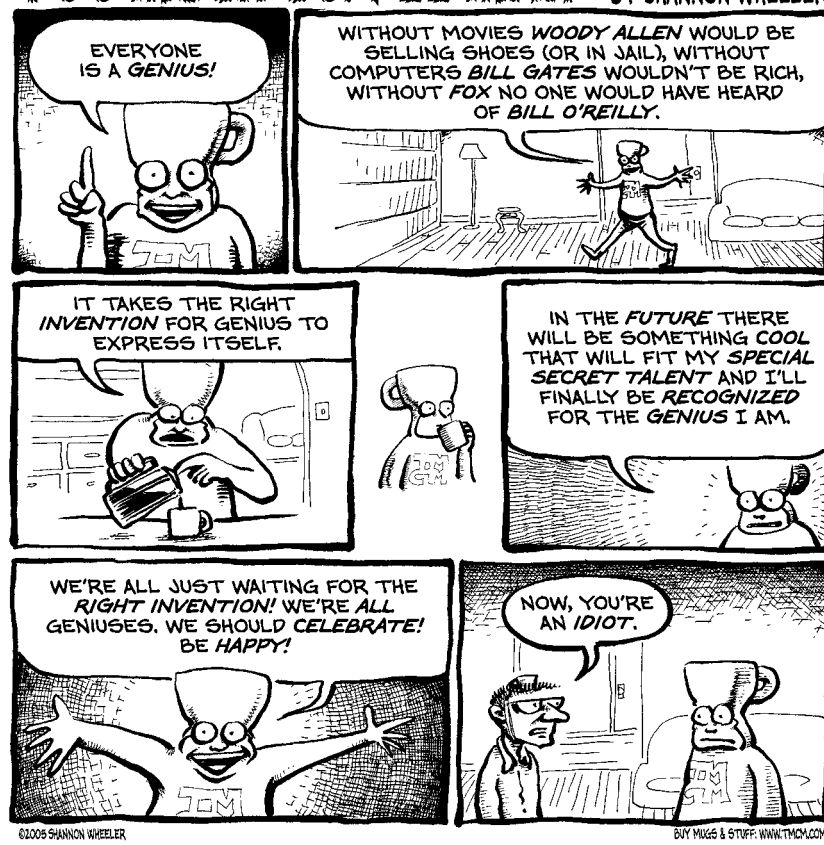
Concentration on the positive does not grow overnight. The intention, however, can rapidly take seed. Every day I must make a conscious decision, and then nurture and feed that choice. I have setbacks and failures on a regular basis. Perhaps I have taken on too many tasks, am overtired, and have neglected my own well-being. It is time to sit quietly and pay specific attention to what and how I am thinking. I remind myself that passenger jets are off-course ninety-five percent of the time, yet they arrive at their destination because the pilot is making incremental corrections. I too, veer off-course and need to find my way back.

As we walk the streets of our world – while we, ideally, act to relieve suffering and prevent harm – at the same time, we can uphold unity. In order to embrace the contradictions so blatant in this world, we have to create a metaphorical vessel within our own hearts sturdy enough for the whole messy stew.

The practice of outward overlooking helps with inward mind patterns as well. When I catch myself in a cascade of negative thoughts, I acknowledge those thoughts and then look past them into the core of what I know to be true: we all breathe the same air; we are given a limited number of days to live; we are wholly responsible to one another, and beyond our differences, we are all one – one being, one family, one town, one country, one world.

Skye Blaine is a member and minister in Sufi Ruhaniat International. This Viewpoint is coordinated by Two Rivers Interfaith Ministries (TRIM), a network of more than 35 religious and spiritual traditions in the Eugene-Springfield area. For information, see www.interfaith Eugene.org or call 914-2614

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BROADER VISION

On July 11 the UO School of Journalism and Communication announced a second major gift to the school's Portland Center and the naming of the center in honor of George S. Turnbull, a distinguished former faculty member, journalist and journalism historian. These investments are powerful endorsements of the school's long tradition of excellence in teaching and research and of our vision for the Turnbull Center. The naming of the center after one of our greatest journalism professors is a clear statement of our commitment to journalism.

Contrary to your report in *Slant* (7/14), our efforts in Portland are not solely focused on "public relations and communication management." Yes, the first graduate degree program we expect to offer is in communication management, but the vision is much broader. As reported in *The Oregonian* (7/12), "the vision for the program extends beyond public relations to the development of future news reporters and editors, and a place where media professionals can engage with academics in the field." Over time the programs at the Turnbull Center will reflect the range of professions represented in Allen Hall.

I regret that *EW* used the occasion of our announcement to smear all public relations professionals and public relations education. The ethical practice of public relations is an essential part of public discourse. It is very much in the public interest for the School of Journalism and Communication to continue to be engaged in teaching future generations of PR professionals and in contributing to the professional and public discussions concerning best practices in the field, as we have been for the better part of a century.

Tim Gleason
Edwin L. Artzt Dean
UO School of Journalism and
Communication



BODY SLAM

As an alum and adjunct faculty member of the UO School of Journalism and Communication — and the immediate past president of the Greater Oregon Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America — I can only view *EW's* body slam of the public relations profession in *Slant* (7/14) as a disservice to PR practitioners everywhere.

The piece starts out with a nice acknowledgment, complimenting the UO on its recent receipt of a major donation to help establish a journalism program at the university's Portland Center. Then comes the sucker punch: The article notes that "the program, which is geared toward public relations and communications management, has drawn criticism from those who think PR is not real journalism, just propaganda, and that it belongs in business schools. Strong arguments can be made," the article contends.

Let's examine the arguments. "The skills taught in journalism schools, just like the skills taught in business schools, can be used for enlightened purposes, or for deception and greed. More disturbing is the growing popularity of PR courses, and the decline in students choosing the news-editorial track. Who do we blame?" the article asks, innocently enough.

Does that mean that print and broadcast journalists are immune from the dark side? Recent problems with deception, plagiarism and fabrication in the news industry would indicate otherwise. I suggest that news journalists take a long, hard look in the mirror. Newspapers and broadcast networks continue to suffer huge declines in readership and viewership, not to mention credibility, because of these recent ethical issues in the news business.

"Meanwhile, the voices of truth and justice across our nation are being drowned out by a cacophony of spinning corporate media schlock and deception," the piece continues.