

A Clear Day

Remembering tea pots and diamonds, covered with dust.

The memorials that sprung up happened overnight: First some candles, then flowers, letters, photocopied missing person signs, art by kids. Soon Union Square was a patchwork of offerings, and people congregated like reverent churchgoers to pay their respects.

Even visiting dignitaries came: Jacques Chirac arrived, a few days after the attacks. My husband was sitting on the steps in the park and saw him get out of his car, walk regally to the display, kneel, and say a silent prayer.

Now as I somnambulate through this unfamiliar Monday, as clear and crisp as that one five years ago, as I move through my usual family discourses — over pools of syrup and Cheerios, presiding over which shoes are OK for the first day of preschool and other pertinent negotiations — puttering through the suburban errands I invent for myself and my petty concerns, today, I'm bothered.

Memory has been like a bird pecking at my shoulder all week, reclaiming the past, reminding me of loss suffered, and people not forgotten.

Union Square, a few days later: A young person has colored a picture of two towers, with smoke rising, all pinks and purples, into the sky. An adult, presumably, has written, the way we adults take dictation from the young, "This is the magic dust that carries people to the stars."

I'm five months pregnant with my daughter.

"I'm sure your baby will be beautiful", says a woman next to me. Guarded New Yorkers both, safe and tough, we hold each other.

Five years. Smoke, rubble, teapots and diamonds covered with dust, for days and weeks. A whole city lying in mourning, a whole people lost.

And I didn't see today coming. Do you ever do that? Feel a sense encroaching as an anniversary mounts, as your body remembers, and worries, doubts, gnashes over some undefined concerns? And then the day arrives, and maybe you think, "Oh, of course."

If I were in New York, this would make sense. Other people would be talking, remembering. People here like to talk about where they were when it happened, to process the moment as a defining one for their culture, their society, themselves.

The front-fold of the local paper told me last week, "How 9/11 changed us." I didn't know that could be defined.

For New Yorkers, "The Events of 9/11" carried on for months. If you were there, you smelled the fires that burned until January. If you were there, you changed everything about your day-to-day, and in the months that accrued, you were happy if just one more little thing came back into normalcy.

People changed their routes to and from work and home, lost their apartments, lost their jobs. Rescuers re-tooled as finders of remains, and they sifted endlessly for bits of people and things, exposing themselves to physical and environmental hazards every day. Funerals followed funerals, and the dead kept speaking, revealing little threads of unraveled conversation, a tapestry, tethered together, stretched, the city — I'll borrow from Sexton — "with a hole in its cheek left open."

Today, I say a prayer for Tom, and send love to his wife and their son. Today, I say a prayer for Billy, and send love to his sister and his family. Today, I say a prayer for Jane, and send love to her mother, who lives alone now. Today, I say thank you to God that Richie wasn't scheduled to work that day. Today, I say thank you to God that Rocco called in sick.

Today, I say thank you to God that my beautiful husband was not in the subway underneath the towers any earlier or any later. I thank God that my husband made his way home that day, tired, scared, searching, but he made it home.

For comfort, I retreat to my role as a wife and a mother and worker. And I live my life and I suppose I should say something pleasing like how grateful I feel that I'm OK and my family is fine.

But I'm still tender from the bruising my adoptive city took.

As the NYC memorials came down, after just a week or so, I remember feeling that it was somehow wrong to remove it all — that we were still grieving, that we couldn't possibly move on yet. The items were boxed up, preserved for posterity, I suppose. But the weight of that spontaneous expression of collective grief meant more to me than any bureaucratized architecture or public planning ever could.

It's an everyday experience for far too many people in the world, to live with fear. Today I'm not grateful to be alive, or to have my family safe. On this day, I say a prayer for the families who suffer.

God grant us peace.



How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IT'S GOOD TO BE QUEEN

She does for slugs what Aretha Franklin did for pop music.

Welcome Queen Slugretha Latifah Uleafa Gastropodia Jackson, the 23rd in line of a multidimensional sorority of slug queens.

From professors, healers, dedicated human services coordinators, accordion-wielding computer geniuses, Southern belle philanthropists, to list only a few — Q. Jackson, our 2006 Eugene slug queen, truly represents our community. I personally wanted to thank the contestants, who were all winners! Sigi Symphona Slug, who really swung it in sequined perfection with an original song with lyrics for the audience and the old queens to sing along! Sigi baby, you're all class!

Gimping Gastropedic Goddess, with her crone-wizened long white hair recited poetry and mystified. Radula, dressed in silver, bearing handmade chocolate muffins with hand-carved sugar slugs on top. Slugalishus answered her question stunningly, a hard act to follow. Slugawarma Hereta-Warnya, the global warming masterpiece of wit and charm, mesmerized me with all she prepared and her hot trails of graciousness.

Monster Tzu, a 15-inch puppet, with glamorous handsomely strange puppeteer: thank you for revealing yourself and entertaining us. I could only see from the back, but the audience gut belly laughed.

You were all stellar! Yes, it was a photo finish, and the Ubiquitous Chain of Slugs crowned Slugretha Latifah Uleafa Gastropodia Jackson.

All I can say to her is "I ain't never loved a slug (the way that I love you)!"

Thank you to all participants, helpers and fans!

Old Queen Frank Slugsnostra
Eugene

DEBI OUT TO LUNCH

I lost my appetite last night after surfing to Debi Farr's website to see what our

House District 14 representative has accomplished since 2004, when she ran on a pro-education platform that emphasized her huge heart.

Well, I wasn't hugely surprised to see that Farr's website offers little evidence that she actually has a heart — much less a huge one — nor gives a hoot about education, as she claims, since during the House vote for K-12 funding (HB 2858), so important to Oregon schools, Debi went to lunch and missed it. That's right folks, Debi went to lunch, so she would not have to vote on a measure that might measure up to her campaign promises for public education. Where was her huge heart then? Perhaps it went to lunch with her, if still actually beating. But more likely it wasn't, having been consumed by her Republican cynicism, along with the voters' trust she inherited when elected. She has, after all, voted with her far-right pals like Karen Minnis more than 98 percent of the time.

I wish I could go to lunch with Ms. Farr and, over a big dish of her melted promises, ask her why she persists in thinking voters will continue to abide her deplorable food. Parents and children alike are sick from it and are ready to send it back along with the server. Let's find someone who actually cares about kids. It certainly isn't Debi Farr, and never was.

Tom Erwin
Eugene

BEST INVESTMENT

As a retired community college economics instructor, a former member of the LCC Board, and as a present member of their budget committee, I would like to offer my views on the subject of funding of higher education in Oregon.

On Sept. 6, the R-G published an opinion piece by Professor Sriram Khe of Western Oregon University in Monmouth. Professor Khe contends that money spend on higher education should more properly be viewed as an investment upon which the citizens of Oregon may expect a return in

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