

should decide whether they deserve the right to control their own bodies. We are a nation of immigrants that remains hostile to newcomers — especially those of a different color or who speak a language we do not understand.

Our nation was founded on the wise principle that governmental power should be dispersed among the three branches of government to avoid the kinds of abuses that led to the American Revolution. And yet, we currently have a president and vice president who act as if they are beyond the reach of any authority but their own. They have ordered or approved the unlimited detention, torture and abuse of “enemy combatants,” the kidnapping and “rendition” of terror suspects to secret prisons in Afghanistan, Poland and Romania, the suspension of basic due process protections for detainees in Guantanamo and the warrantless wiretapping and data-mining of American citizens.

And yet we are a nation of people who share a vision and common values that are far better than our leaders today. We will live up to that vision and continue our long march toward liberty and justice for all.

What makes you hopeful about the country right now?

The courageous career civil servants and members of the military in the FBI, CIA, NSA and the Pentagon who have leaked the information about the abuses carried out by this administration. They have risked not only their careers but also long prison sentences to alert the American people about the illegal and unconstitutional activities that have been carried pursuant to the orders of the president and vice president. If this were the 1950s or '60s, we wouldn't have known what was being done in our names under a cloak of secrecy.

How are you participating in making the U.S. a better place to live?

I am lucky enough to have a great job that allows me to work on the issues I care about every day, but the secret is that anyone can work on these issues by believing that together we can make a difference — and by exercising the most precious right of all, the right to vote.

If you had an unlimited supply of money and/or time to tackle one problem, what would it be and what would you do?

I would work to reform the initiative and referendum process to ensure that no one's fundamental constitutional or civil rights could be subjected to the whim of the majority.

Becky Flynn is a community activist and a lawyer who describes herself as a former professional grassroots organizer. See her partner Sharon's responses on our website, www.eugeneweekly.com

Tell me one or two things (people, historical movements or documents, etc.) that you admire in or about the United States.

Sojourner Truth's speech, delivered in 1851 at a women's convention in Akron, Ohio, is one of the most powerful, gutsy, and deeply inspiring speeches I have encountered.

[The speech can be found at Fordham University's Modern History Sourcebook, www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.html]

Toni Van Deusen is a poet, a participant in the Lane Literary Guild and a volunteer who gives time and energy to teaching poetry. In answer to our questions, Van Deusen gave us a short prose response about her background and, generously, a poem.

I'm an Air Force Brat. I grew up steeped in a kind of ceremonial patriotism that never extended to any sort of “my country right or wrong” values. My father, a WWII veteran who served his country for almost 30 years, hung a piece of black cloth over his American flag on the day Bush began the Iraq War. The flag he loved still flew outside his house, along with a symbol of shame and sorrow.

I don't live here because I'm patriotic. I live here because America is my home: family, friends, language and customs. As Robert Frost said, “Home is where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”



Retreat

I felt sorry for kids who lived in civilian towns.
Between the wars, I never gave a thought to what it was all for.

We lived across acres of razor-cut green from Headquarters,
a red brick square with The Flag out front.

Decommissioned fighters, tricked out and grounded,
stood on empty street corners. One blood-red and bat-winged,

an F-102, my favorite. All our parents had been in the war,
but that was long ago, before I'm were born,

before the Wild West where we played cowboys and Indians
endlessly in the sticky Illinois summer afternoons

and on into the blinking firefly evenings.
Every day at sundown, the siren would sound Retreat —

Every car on the road stopped, everyone outside
downed shovels and cap guns and laundry baskets,

stood facing HQ and The Flag, hand over heart, caps off,
the men in uniform rigid and saluting. This busy hive,

this small city, one as the Flag was lowered with immense ceremony
and the firing of rifles into the dusk. Then all silent

as the Anthem crackled over loudspeakers. Played as it was meant
to be, by a military band, solemn, loud, unmistakably martial.

As the last echo of home of the brave trailed away, life resumed.
My friends and I ran around to the street behind our houses

to see the Chanute Air Force Band march past, colored boys
most of them, in immaculate dress blues, trumpets and trombones

gleaming golden in the last light. Some days there was music,
Sousa and George M. Cohen, Irving Berlin. Some days

simply their deep voices shouting the cadence: *I don't know,*
but I've been told ... Between the wars, I thought all of this beautiful.

What makes you hopeful about the country right now?

The fact that presidents can only serve two terms in office.

How are you participating in making the U.S. a better place to live?

I have lobbied my elected representatives through letters, phone calls, face-to-face visits and public testimony, urging them to vote to protect civil liberties and to oppose attempts by our current corporatocracy to turn America into a theocratic police state.

BECKY FLYNN WITH DAUGHTER HAILEY



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