

# Bloody Hell

Tales from an Iraq surgical hospital morgue

**T**oday I helped put another dead U.S. Marine serving in Iraq into the morgue. Part of my job entails taking off whatever gear or clothing they have on, which was rather easy in this case because he was missing everything from the waist down, along with his right arm. In one of his pockets was an unfinished postcard, covered in blood and tucked away ever so neatly into his flack jacket. All it said was, "Hey honey."



It made me feel strange, angry, sad and helpless. If he could have known he was going to die, what would he have written? He assumed he would finish it after his patrol.

I felt compelled to share this vivid portrayal of what is really happening in Iraq from this soldier's viewpoint. I'm serving a second tour, this time guarding a surgical hospital not far from the front lines.

We stripped him down and moved him from the bag he was in to the body bag. I had the head section. As I lifted him, his mouth flew open, and all I could smell was mint Listerine. I don't think I'll ever use that brand again. After putting what was left of his body into the body bag, we had to scoop up his entrails with our gloved hands and then put on his toe tag, which in this case went on his ring finger. Then we drove the short distance to the morgue.

There are signs here that read, "Stay off the grass." At first it seems comical. Grass in the desert? And we're to stay off? OK. Got it. Stay off the grass. But I had an epiphany this day when reading the sign on the way to the morgue. Here's this grass. It's there when we wake up. It's there when we clock out. It's there when we sleep. The only thing here that's guaranteed to be there tomorrow is this green grass because we are ordered to stay off. It is said in parts of Africa the soil is stained red from the blood shed from all the people who have died in the wars there. If that's true, why is this grass green here in Iraq? Oh yeah that's right, we're to stay off of the grass. OK. Got it. Stay off of the grass.

We arrived in front of the morgue, opened the door and turned on the lights. What bastards those lights are. Almost taunting – life and death only a switch away. Life only waiting until we decide to flip the switch, and here we are with a man who gave everything for his country, and there is no switch in the world that can turn this brave American on. He is permanently off.

So, in goes the body, normally feet first, but this brave American soldier is missing that half, so we unzip the bag so he can be identified. Then the door is closed and off go those infernal lights.

It's time for a cigarette, which is more of a brief clemency for us before it's on to the next patient. "How is your night?" some patients in the hospital ask. I reply with a lie, and I can tell they see it in my eyes, but I grimace a smile anyway to bolster their and my morale.

**A**fter a long night, I make the short walk to my room, making sure not to step one foot on the grass, before I attempt to fall asleep. There will be no sleep tonight. Another night of wandering around the hospital, trying to find something good to do to rectify the feelings of hate I have inside. All the patients are already asleep and all the medical supplies neatly restocked and ready for the next emergency. Off in the distance I hear another helicopter, and I get ready for another tragic round to what seems to be a literal and figurative endless war.

Another sleepless night in my conscious nightmare as I collect megabytes of horrific and undigested images of this living hell. I don't know what I am more afraid of: staying here or coming home and trying to process all that I have seen, endured, ultimately trying to heal all the scar tissue I have accumulated.

*Cpl. Grant Monge of Coos Bay serves with the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq. This letter appeared on the blog campusbug.com and is reprinted with permission of the author. Morgue photos taken by the author can be seen on our web version of this commentary.*

## How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler

INVENTOR FISH



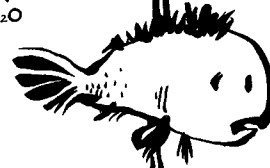
I THINK ALL DAY LONG.



I HAVE A LOT OF IDEAS..



LIKE AN ENGINE THAT RUNS ON WATER. BY USING THE ENERGY THAT'S RELEASED WHEN YOU LIBERATE HYDROGEN ATOMS FROM THE H<sub>2</sub>O MOLECULE...



I CAN'T TRAVEL THROUGH TIME, BUT WE COULD SEND BINARY MESSAGES TO THE PAST BY PIGGY-BACKING THEM ON TIME-TRAVELING QUARKS.

I HAVE A CURE FOR CANCER, I KNOW HOW TO ACHIEVE WORLD PEACE, AND I WROTE A NOVEL BASED ON A CHESS SET.

SO MANY IDEAS...



IF ONLY I COULD REACH THAT PEN.



©2007 SHANNON WHEELER

WWW.TMCM.COM

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SPRAWL AWAY

Looking at the U.S. Census data comparing Eugene to Springfield (cover story, 6/21), I'm inclined to suggest that Springfield be allowed to sprawl to its heart's content while Eugene makes the obviously better choice to (at least attempt to) limit sprawl development. We can all rest assured that Springfield's sprawl will only go so far. It is a fact of physical reality that growth is unsustainable. Period.

Unsustainable behavior will not continue, but what Springfield and Eugene both may wish to consider is that while achieving sustainability now through bold leadership and sacrifice may be somewhat traumatic for the economy, it will ultimately be less difficult than waiting for unsustainable behavior like rampant growth and development to stop as a result of reaching the natural limitations of resources, energy or space.

As a footnote to this letter, when I refer to sustainability, I mean genuine, meaningful sustainability. This is distinct from what politicians refer to as "sustainability," or what I call "sustainability light," which in reality is not sustainable at all.

Robert Bolman  
Eugene

### WRECKING CREW

I do not support "our" troops in Iraq. I realize most of them were too young to know what they were getting into when they signed up to be part of the Wrecking Crew, but what they are doing is immoral. The only support I would offer them is to bring them home and give them adequate medical care and social services.

We ought to raise the legal military enlistment age to 21 so these stupid kids would have to grow up some before they could volunteer to be paid killers for the American imperial war machine. Almost no one at 18 or 19 has the faintest idea what American foreign policy is about, which is expanding the American empire and making money for

large corporations. (I joined the Navy at 19, a long time ago.)

In a recent article on [www.counter-punch.org](http://www.counter-punch.org) an Army surgeon who treated soldiers wounded in Iraq is quoted as saying that he "amputated the genitals of one or two men every day." Well, there go the grandchildren. I don't care how large a bonus they give you to join, is it worth spending the rest of your life with no sex?

Lynn Porter  
Eugene

### JAILING THE MESSENGERS

At a Senate hearing on "ecoterrorism," Sen. Jeffords stated succinctly: "In our current state of fear, it is easy to get headlines by using the term terrorism. But sometimes, a criminal is just a criminal." Unfortunately, the motive for labeling the recently convicted eco-saboteurs as terrorists is not simply to grab headlines. Instead, just like with the COINTELPRO, the label seemed to be intended to discredit their important message and downplay or dismiss the very real and frightening environmental realities which motivated these activists' desperate acts.

Throughout the sentencing hearings, the government attorneys flippantly quoted ELF communiqués as if the messages contained therein were the rantings of lunatics.

Sadly, their messages cannot be so easily dismissed. Biologists estimate that by 2100, half of the species on the planet will be extinct. Global climate change is already swallowing populated islands. Genetically engineered crops are irreversibly altering the genetic integrity of biodiversity. Toxic chemicals are building up in our bodies, in our soil and in our drinking water. Humans, of course, are causing these problems.

It is understandable that the young people born into this ecological catastrophe feel overwhelmingly deep despair because they realize that our life support system is unraveling. Indeed, it is not only young people who feel this despair. A recent Gallup Poll indi-

WHO YOU GONNA BLAME?

**EDITORIAL** Editor Ted Taylor  
**News Editor** Alan Pittman **Reporter** Camilla Mortensen  
**Arts & Music Editor** Molly Templeton  
**Performing & Visual Arts/Copy Editor** Suzi Steffen  
**Calendar Editor** Chuck Adams  
**Contributing Editor** Anita Johnson  
**Contributing Writers** Bryan Andersen, Sara Brickner, Jason Blair, Joshua Blanchard, Amanda Burhop, Jes Burns, Brett Campbell, Rachael Carnes, Wade Christiansen, Michael Cockram, David Constantine, John Dooley, Rachel Foster, Phillip Getty, James Johnston, Zach Klassen, Sarah Mazze, Sharleen Nelson, Mary O'Brien, Aaron Ragan-Fore, Vanessa Salvia, Steven Sawada, Sally Sheklow, Lance Sparks, Eva Sylwester, Adrienne van der Valk  
**Interns** Erin Rokita, Deanna Uutela  
**ART DEPARTMENT**  
**Art Director/Production Manager** Kevin Dougherty  
**Graphic Artist/Webmaster** James Bateman  
**Graphic Artists** Shannon Browning, Barbara Cooper, Todd Cooper  
**Baby** Samara Cooper  
**Contributing Photographers** Kurt Jensen, Paul Neevel  
**ADVERTISING**  
**National Sales Manager** Mark Frisbee  
**Display Marketing Consultant** Jennifer Donohue, Rob Weiss  
**Advertising Traffic Coordinator** Geneva "Goddess" Miller  
**Classified Manager** Jennifer Donohue **Reception** Jayme Fuller  
**Classified Marketing Consultant** Janus Brestzny

**BUSINESS Director of Sales and Marketing** Bill Shreve  
**Circulation Manager** Danica Stiles **Baby** Persaeus Eilah Zapata Stiles  
**Controller** Paula Hoemann **Distributors** Bob Becker, Matt Bryson, Margaret Garrison, Tobin Herrera, Susan and David Lawson, Tim Risch, Quick Draw, Pedalers Express **Printing** Signature Graphics

### HOW TO REACH US BY E-MAIL:

(letters): editor@eugeneweekly.com  
 (advertising): ads@eugeneweekly.com  
 (classifieds): classy@eugeneweekly.com  
 (personals): personals@eugeneweekly.com  
 (calendar): cal@eugeneweekly.com  
 (music/clubs/special shows): music@eugeneweekly.com  
 (art/openings/galleries): visualarts@eugeneweekly.com  
 (performance/theater): performance@eugeneweekly.com  
 (literary arts/readings): books@eugeneweekly.com  
 (movies/film screenings): movies@eugeneweekly.com  
 (circulation): distribution@eugeneweekly.com