

Crying Through *Sicko*

Replace expensive, rickety health system with single-payer

On July 4, I walked with my sister through the park by the river to Valley River Center to see Michael Moore's new film *Sicko*.

Arriving at Regal Cinemas early, we were subjected to two right-wing propaganda ads against marijuana and for the National Guard. Both made me angry. I wondered if the theater owner had decided to stick it to us lefties.



Reviews of *Sicko* have not done justice to its huge emotional impact. This is a four handkerchief movie, and unfortunately I only took two. I was either crying or laughing through most of it. Moore is a master at making you feel what he wants you to feel and deftly inserting leftist ideas into the American mind. You come out of the theater smiling. It's only later that the outrage at his intended target sets in.

Moore made the political decision to touch briefly on the plight of the uninsured, my main concern, and spend most of the movie on the struggles of the insured with their HMOs. I've been studying the health insurance issue for years, and I had no idea. I knew that there had been fights in the 1990s between HMOs and the insured over coverage, but I thought all that had been settled.

Nope. The HMOs are still at it, using all sorts of sneaky strategies to deny coverage. They will simply refuse to insure anyone with any of a long list of pre-existing conditions, although Moore doesn't mention that if you're an employee, these exclusions don't apply after a certain waiting period. It used to be six months, as I recall.

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But that doesn't settle it. The insurance company can still deny coverage later on the basis that you didn't declare some very minor illness when you filled out your application or that you didn't know about an illness that a reasonable person would have known about.

They can also refuse to cover a treatment your doctor recommends if they consider it ineffective or "experimental," even if it's commonly used.

In other words, anything to avoid paying up. How it is possible to maintain this system I don't know, except that the American middle class is so indifferent to politics and terminally passive. I think too that most people don't know what their insurance covers until they have to use it for a serious illness, and then it's too late. And of course you have to take whatever your employer gives you.

Moore points out that there is a fundamental conflict in privatized, for-profit medical insurance: The HMOs make a profit by denying care. He contrasts that with the single-payer, government run health care systems in other civilized countries. Because we have to pay the high administrative costs of insurance companies, including their profits and the high salaries of their CEOs, the U.S. spends much more per person on health care than other countries, with much poorer measured results in terms of life expectancy, infant mortality, etc. We are not getting our money's worth from our rickety, patchwork health care system.

Many of us are hoping that *Sicko* will start a serious debate about medical insurance in this country, pushing us towards a single-payer, universal health care solution. The issue is being felt in national and state politics, but so far the politicians have offered us what my parents would have called Rube Goldberg contraptions, complicated public-private hybrids that keep the insurance companies in the loop. (Goldberg was a cartoonist who drew complex, absurd machines.)

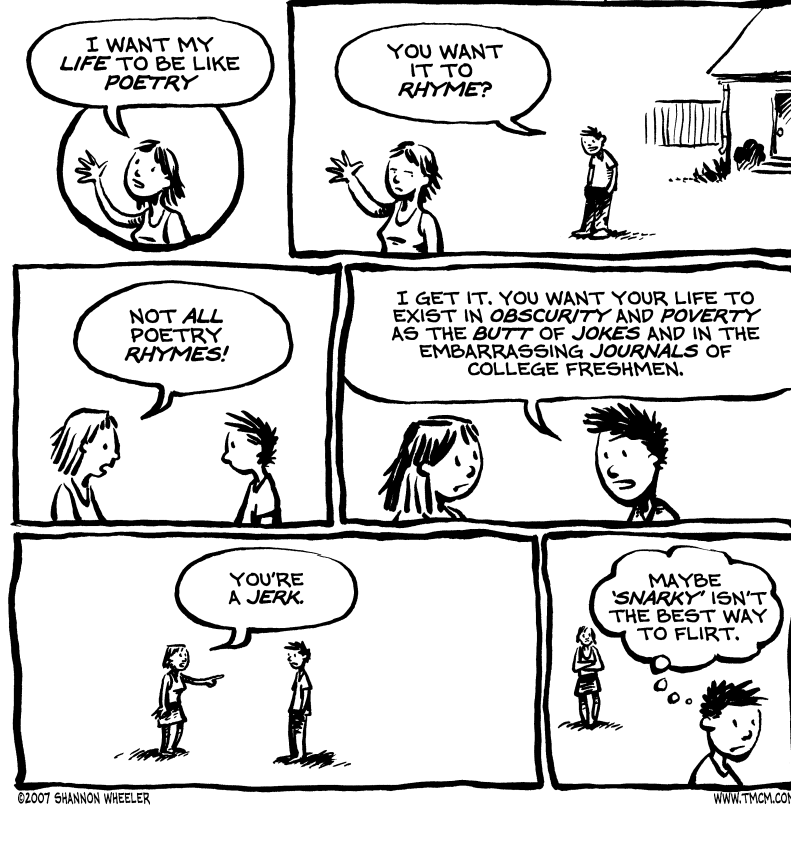
The Oregon Legislature just passed SB 329, the "Healthy Oregon Act." Insofar as I can even understand it, the legislation would set up a voluntary medical insurance purchasing pool for people who are uninsured or on Medicaid, about 30 percent of the population. A lot of the details about benefits, financing, etc. are still vague. An appointed board is supposed to come up with a plan to present to the legislature in 2008, and it wouldn't go into effect until 2010.

What we really need is a nationalized single-payer plan. We won't get it without a strong political push. Health care activists need to understand that whatever proposal they come up with has to be simple enough for most people to understand.

Lynn Porter is a Eugene resident active in health and other social issues.

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FLABBERGASTED

I had a short story of mine recently posted by your company ("Bloody Hell" Viewpoint, 7/5), and I'm not quite sure that that is a good thing. I wanted my message to give insight from the service member's viewpoint, not become a message of anti-war. I'm a very proud Marine. I love my country, God and Corps.

I love every person that supports us or hates us. That's part of why we join — to fight for the rights of those who are either not capable or too cowardly to do it themselves.

Upon viewing your website, I saw a letter to the editor ("Wrecking Crew," 7/5) from someone who was clearly anti-troop. I was flabbergasted. I can understand anti-war. I even sympathize with some families that have lost their own. But for someone to be anti-troop is just ignorant. And to post a story from someone who calls service members stupid is simply fantastic. Thank you.

Again, I believe in freedom of speech and love that freedom. But how about posting something pro-troop for a change? Why not show some of my brothers and sisters that you care? Or is it too hard to be equal or compassionate?

I know and understand that by writing you, I'm going to accomplish absolutely nothing, but I figured I'd try anyway. That's the great thing about my brothers and sisters that I work with. When things are wrong, even when it seems hopeless, we try. We don't give up. And we fight for what's right. Sometimes it's a lonely road. But we fight.

Cpl. Grant E. Monge
USMC HLT
Baghdad LNO

ELVES ARE BUSY

As the Oregon Country Fair approaches, I am struck again by its similarity to Christmas in the city's mentality. Elves are busy working; fancy clothes are being sewn; special food is being prepared and lots and lots of happy intentions are directed towards these three special days. And like Christmas, the fair does not always live up to the fantasy. We can infuse these days with so much hope and

expectation that they cannot possibly live up to it. Tragedy can strike someone's family and create an unhappy anniversary.

This year I plan to have a good time at the fair. I've dealt with my old ghosts as much as I can. Still, I send out extra love for those for whom this time of year is the Eugene equivalent of being Jewish at Christmas. There is nothing wrong with you because you have not found happiness at the fair, in Christmas or in other holidays. It's how we live day to day that counts the most; what we're like off-stage, in ordinary clothes, that matters. You will find your place.

I've heard that there is some conflict between performers and crafters because the performers often have to spend money to perform at the fair, and some crafters make enough money to last all year. I do not know how this will be resolved, but as an artist who is not making money at the fair, I still want to support my performer friends. I'm suggesting that we artists who may not have money to give performers give them some of our art. I've never been sorry I gave my art away.

Ruby Colette
aka Ruby the Resourcecess
Eugene

ANOTHER WITNESS

I was present at the Eugene Public Library Storytime on June 13 when the police gave their program. The information presented by the two parents who wrote their irate objections (6/28) was colored by emotionalism and was not entirely accurate. I would like to present the facts as I saw them.

First of all, the "gun" issue: Sgt. Barrong, a soft-spoken, petite policewoman, did not show the children her gun — she simply spoke of it as being a weapon which she carried and had never fired in all her years on the police force, "unlike the police you see shooting on television." She also stressed the special training required to safely use the weapon and that it was only used as a last resort. She did not say that police are the only people who "get to" use guns. This implies a special treat, which was not stated or intended.