

Hate The Crime

Love the criminal

I started writing this on Father's Day after thinking about what kind of father raises a kid, or what kind of hunger for an absent father drives a kid to beat someone else's father with a baseball

bat, or in the Eugene scenario, a fish club. Though the victim does not recall racialized language, the number of assailants and the weapon used bring to mind an earlier scenario.

What other scenario involves multiple armed white assailants against a single black one? Unlike the 1988 Portland murder of another father, Mulageta Seraw, by skinheads with a baseball bat, this latest beating hasn't resulted in death, but not for lack of trying. It's a signature crime, much like a burning cross, a hangman's noose, lynching photography or a gang tag I found in a local park: KKK.

Cornel West sang on "9/11" from the CD *Never Forget: A Journey of Revelations* that as a result of 9/11, all Americans feel "unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence and hated." Indeed he said, "To be a Nigger in America is to be unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence and hated." And "since 9/11, America has been niggerized, then America feels the way Black America has always felt." So he suggests that a nation with the blues can learn from a blues people how to deal with such circumstances.



Who raises a kid to hate, and how does a kid come to hate their own family?

For my personal sense of safety, nothing has really changed. There have always been certain Eugene neighborhoods that I personally wouldn't walk late at night, but more from the sense that I would be considered a danger, not because I felt unsafe myself.

To be sure when a mixed race child beat another mixed race child's grandfather to death in this town a few years ago, I thought about my own grandfather, who was a surrogate father to me when my own father was absent at medical school.

Raised as I was in an extended family with only my maternal grandfather (a kinder, gentler version of the Rev. Wright), I tended to think of my elders as a necessary and valuable natural resource. Raising a hand to one was fairly unthinkable. But in these days of video parenting through *Grand Theft Auto IV* and the Internet, it seems today to be a different story. Kids spend more time interacting with technology than with living systems, whether human beings or nature.

While the hands that raised me used books as well as the proverbial peach switch as part of my edification, the peach switch was used to instill a certain discipline that preserved life when one was unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence, hated. While we omitted the peach switch in my generation, the book and our various people's histories helped raise my daughters to be the women they are.

Who raises a kid to hate, and how does a kid come to hate their own family? My own father, a psychiatrist, remarked that it wasn't so much a kid's parental upbringing as the rearing by the larger parent: Society. If Society taught you to use your anger against your weakness and taught you that weakness was ignorance of yourself, then that points you towards a certain inner strength through self-knowledge. The only reason I take this quasi-philosophical bent is that the Aramaic translation of "love your enemy" is instructions on how to do it. Those instructions require you to see into your enemy's heart. But the path to seeing your enemy's heart lies through your own, wherein you see that your enemy and you are intrinsically connected; in fact, you're part of the same being.

But what kind of society can teach three skinheads how to see their common humanity in an older black man they encounter late at night? And maybe they're not skinheads but simply imitating a tradition that once was common here in Eugene – an incident that even if reported to the police would not be responded to, one that the paper would not report on and the mayor would not comment on. These events happened within the living memory of Black Eugeneans, and though it's different today, clearly some individual parents or societal parents need to change their parenting style yet.

Mark Harris is an instructor in ethnic studies and substance abuse prevention at LCC.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Your report on the mayors (6/12) is a very good example and much of the information is twisted so that Mayor Kitty, bless her, has not made one single mistake in the entire three years she has been in office; every problem she has had was someone else's making, and she is just the kind of simple person of the world doing little things to make Eugene better. But Mr. Torrey, oh my God, what a terrible person, who lives on the dark side and calls down fire and darkness, death and destruction.

Kind of strange, is it not, that almost half of Eugene disagrees with you — could it be you are wrong?

But to give you credit, unlike *The Register-Guard* who states, they are "impartial and endeavor to be candid but fair and helpful," then goes on just as you do, generally putting that person or issue in a bad light to suit their view. As I said, to your credit you make no statement nor pretense about being fair or impartial, which you are not. So knowing that when picking up your magazine I find that is exactly what I get. So I have no hard feelings, but it does bring a smile and many "You have to be kidding" comments with a huge laugh. Thanks many times over for bringing laughter to my day.

*Dick Walker
Eugene*

PAIN FOR THE DRIVER

I read with strong interest of the June 2 car-bicycle accident in *The Register-Guard* in which David Minor died. Then in the June 12 edition of the *EW* I read what a remarkable young person David was.

On May 1, 1990, I was in a similar accident where I was in the car and the cyclist died. The PTSD I once scoffed at is real.

The man I killed, James Michaels, died a horrible but quick death. His brother called me and said, "I feel bad about my brother, but I feel worse for you."

He was right. When I see a dead animal in the road, or a bicyclist, I squeeze the water out of my steering wheel. A cop car or ambulance lights up, I panic. I have nightmares that I can't tell anyone about. Someone taps on my shoulder and they will be looking at the ceiling. I live reclusively, avoiding risk.

It is sad that a young man with such a slate of positives and goodness has died. I feel bad for his family and friends.

Bad also for the driver of that car. Her mortality will be something you wouldn't want.

*Guy Hume
Creswell*

BROADWAY GHETTO

A two block radius along Eugene's downtown Broadway reveals neglect, abandonment and graffiti on seven buildings that are for sale by the Urban Renewal Agency (URA). The sale of seven properties was listed in *EW* under legal notices last week. After reading this article I decided to go down and sit in the area described above.

While sitting on a bench in front of a friend's former art shop, The Alder Street Gallery, I'm reminded of how thriving this block use to be. Today it's quiet with trash in the corners of desolate doorways. This

building in front of me has huge wooden doors that are bolted shut with a lock on the handles. Windows located on the alley side of the building once in glass with art displayed are now boarded up with graffiti all over.

The only time I've walked down these two blocks in the past few years would be when the Eugene Celebration was happening for a weekend in September. These buildings would have music, food and craft booths in front of them so it was easy to walk on by without really seeing how boarded up our block party had become.

The smell of cigarette smoke that I'm forced to breathe as I sit on this bench in front of the former art gallery reminds me that I'm not alone. Homeless-looking youth preferring to wear black to pastels hang around the empty building in no particular hurry to leave while enjoying their tobacco.

The process for purchasing all seven properties in these two blocks is by sealed bids. The purchase options will be sold to the offer best meeting the URA's needs. The price range of these properties is \$68,000 to \$3 million.

Only a few blocks away are our library, the Hult Center and the Downtown Athletic Club. What happened to this area to have it become a ghetto of neglect? Hopefully the sale of these seven properties will bring renewed energy and interest into this area that has for far too long been abandoned.

*Marlene Gayle Varady
Eugene*

ROSES FOR DAD

Joni Mitchell's album *For the Roses* was originally subtitled, "What the Racehorses Really Run For."

Sons know that sports trophies and war medals are the way to a father's heart. Dads want brag rights with their friends. Embarrass Dad and he'll drop you flat.

During the height of the Vietnam medley, a young vet, Barry Sadler, was a media darling for his "Ballad of the Green Beret."

His song was exploited ad nauseum on the radio and on the then four-channel, pre-cable TV. *Put silver wings on my son's chest. Make him one of America's best. He'll be a man they'll test one day. Have him win the Green Beret.*

Years later, I read incidentally in the paper that he'd committed suicide. He'd embarrassed the fraternal media, and they responded by abandoning him at his graveside.

There was no mention of what happened to his son.

*Lori Kasprzak
Eugene*

HEALING THE RIFT

The June 3 press conference at City Hall on police/community relations and the police auditor program/external police review was well attended and inspiring. Community members stepped up to speak from their hearts, not their fears; Exhorting all community members to work together to heal the rift between the police union and much of our community. Wounds (physical and otherwise), slights, misunderstandings have been borne by all "sides," underscoring how riven things have become. But trust is a two-way street.