

Taking a Step

Toward an America that does not yet exist

The euphoria of election night turned to mild annoyance with the theft of my magnetic Obama sticker off my car, reading about gun owners stocking up on guns and ammo because Obama is a “gun-snatcher” and listening to 20-something McCain supporters talk about the Obama Muslim thing and “He didn’t put his hand over his heart for the national anthem so he’s not patriotic.” Look, your guy said in a classy concession speech, “He’s my president, and I will support him, and I urge you to.” Amidst the boos.



In my own version of support, I did not take Chris Rock up on his “black holiday” notion (no matter the outcome, blacks take a vacation day) but went to work as usual. Relief at our LCC bond passing and the elections that were settled was tangible. I had to confess to my Ethnic Studies class that I was proud to be an American for the first time since April 5, 1968. April 4, 1968 was the last time I saluted the flag.

On April 5, the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was shot, my history teacher Mr. Wood, a member of the John Birch Society, a lifetime member of the NRA (as my parents called it, the Negro Removal Association), told my eighth grade first period history class that he was glad King was dead and that King had it coming because he was a troublemaker. I was shocked and objected, asking why someone who is a nonviolent change advocate should deserve to die. I didn’t particularly have much respect for Dr. King while he was alive, being much more enamored with Malcolm X and the Panthers at the time. But this was wrong.

In homeroom the next period, still upset, I told my homeroom teacher Mrs. Castillo what Mr. Wood had said. She agreed with him. In response, my entire table refused to stand up for the flag salute, which was mandatory in those days. Our stated reasoning to Mrs. Castillo was that if Martin Luther King Jr. deserved to die for advocating nonviolent change, then “liberty and justice for all” was a lie that we were no longer going to participate in. And we weren’t going to say it again until it was actually true. Now even though I wasn’t saluting the flag, I still loved my country enough to try to make liberty and justice for all actually true. So in middle school, we started working on the 18-year-old vote, which has been a reality for so long the 20 somethings take it for granted that its always been that way. (Sorry kids, lowering the drinking age is not on the same footing.) We also began our scholarship in the University of the Hood. The University of the Hood is one of many names for the Indigenous African Empowerment Matrix, which, though Africans were here before Columbus, arose in response to chattel slavery, beginning in 1619.

Known to my parents as “old school,” its truths are passed on covertly from those who know to those who don’t but wish to. Its lessons are encoded in normal everyday speech, coded recursive symbology and hidden history.

Barack Obama is not a descendant of slaves – but he does weave in an old school cultural analysis as evidenced by weaving MLK’s “Mountain Top” speech, the story of the 106-year-old woman and others demonstrating African Royal Worth, i.e. uniting others across differences.

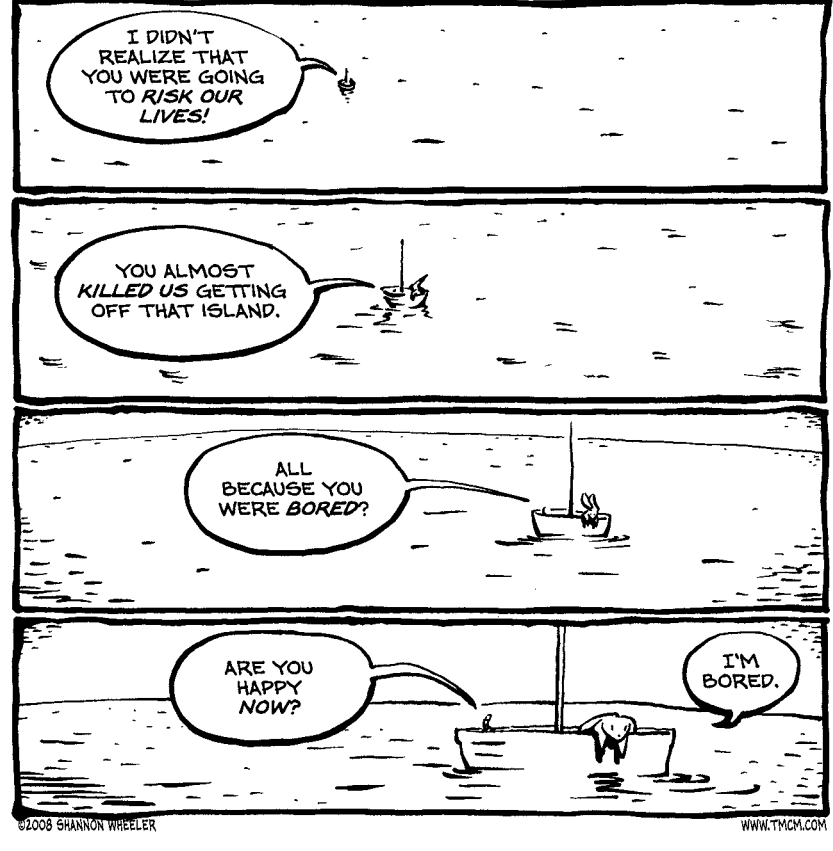
During WWII, American corporations such as ITT, General Motors, Ford, IBM and Standard Oil did business with Nazi Germany, and none of those Americans were locked up. Some even received medals for service to their country. I feel they were rewarded for values of love of profit over “country first” style patriotism. As our current financial crisis has similar roots, I’m hoping for a different America, one that doesn’t exist yet.

To a local Japanese-American veteran of the 442nd, I once asked, “Why did you fight for a racist country that put you in concentration camps simply because of the color of your skin?” The answer: “We were fighting for an America that doesn’t exist yet. An America where such things could never happen. In order for that to occur we must fight for her now.”

I’m working for an America that doesn’t exist yet – where national security means every human being who wishes to contribute to the common good of the country is a citizen. Where everyone is clothed, fed, sheltered, educated to the level necessary to support themselves, their families and their mental, emotional and spiritual health and their deepest dreams. That’s a little beyond Barack’s vision for America, but I think he’s a step in the right direction.

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

How to Be Happy (CUTIE ISLAND) NO OF 8 by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMERICAN ROYALTY

On Nov. 4 we the people of the U.S. elected our first African-American president, which is a milestone in and of itself. But that is not all; he is the first political leader of my lifetime to inspire my hope and love. Now I know how the British must feel about their royalty. This is a love affair, first with Barack Obama, but also extending to his whole family. It tickles me pink to know that this beautiful black family will be residing in the White House and will be the beacon for all of America.

Obama is the first politician that I have heard speak of love in a way that feels like it really comes from the heart. His message of unity is what we need right now, and I believe his inspiring leadership will allow the best of our country to step up and start enacting some of the changes we so desperately need. He will open fertile ground for the Peaceful Revolution.

These are good times to be living. This feeling is enforced by our local election as well. It was close, but we can look forward to Kitty Piercy and Rob Handy forwarding the vision of sustainability in our community. Let us make broad steps into a new era.

Zan Akerson
Eugene

IT'S ALL POSSIBLE NOW

I have a funny feeling inside — one I haven’t ever had in the realm of presidential politics. I’m happy, no, thrilled, about our new president. He isn’t perfect; I won’t always agree with what he decides, I know that, but this is the first time someone who makes me feel hopeful has won the Oval Office, and I’m excited!

Usually I’ve voted for the lesser of evils or for an independent who I agreed with but knew wouldn’t win. For years I’ve been anti-politics, seeing the entire governmental fiasco as a big sham and a hopeless mess that I didn’t want to waste

my time on. I’ve prayed for revolution. I’ve been absolutely disgusted with politicians for their spin, doublespeak, lies and dishonor. I’ve come very close to permanently leaving the country out of anger. Even though I still think our system is quite broken, and I’m still ashamed of this country’s criminal misconduct around the world, today I’m feeling like anything is possible.

On Nov. 4 I felt truly proud to be an American for the first time in my life. If the people of this country can work together like they did to get Obama elected, this could really be a great country again. I’m waiting on the edge of my seat, ready to do my part.

Sandra Lee Bronstein
Eugene

EMPTY RHETORIC

The allowed parameters for thinking about society and the earth are narrow. As they should be. Of course it doesn’t hurt that \$1 billion was spent electorally to enforce those limits.

In any case: Thank you, voters! Your pledge of faith in a system that so systematically attacks life in every sphere is touching. It guarantees that things will only get worse. But who could say that your continuing thirst for the emptiest of rhetoric is misplaced? (Maybe next time we can market “sustainable” eco-collapse and “green” school and mall shootings.)

You did your prescribed duty. Please stay within the limits provided for you.

What else could there possibly be?
John Zerzan
Eugene

REPAIR PRIORITIES

We all know there are many streets and roads that need repair here in Eugene and some are getting it, but what determines which ones get it first?

Roosevelt Boulevard between Chambers and Belt Line Road must have