

ALL THE NEWS THAT fits

MIKE WEBER OF *LANE COUNTY
MUGSHOTS UNCENSORED*
PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

LOOKING AT EUGENE THROUGH THE ONLINE LENS OF **LANE COUNTY MUGSHOTS UNCENSORED**

BY RICK LEVIN

I have a confession to make: I'm a junky for *Lane County Mugshots Uncensored* — a massive, sprawling, closed-group Facebook page revolving around the spectacle of daily mugshot postings released to the public by Lane County law enforcement and other nearby jurisdictions.

I'm not proud. I have an addictive personality, and something about the site — its raw, adrenalized hit of unreconstructed civic collapse from the street level — makes me feel giddy and dirty and kind of sick at the same time.

Along with the daily mugshots, which freeze alleged suspects in various poses of defeat, defiance and degeneracy, *Lane County Mugshots Uncensored* features the spontaneous and unreconstructed posts of site members who assume, somewhat recklessly, the role of amateur reporters cranking out copy on issues of law and disorder throughout the community.

The site also offers reposts from local law enforcement as well as crime reports from media sources such as *KVAL* and *The Register-Guard*.

Whenever I recognize a face that pops up in a daily mugshot feed — which happens surprisingly often, thanks to the particular crowd I run in — my first thought is: “Damn, girl, you look like hell. Guess you got what you had coming, eh?” My next thought is: “Poor fucker.” And then I blast myself for my uncharitable and superior attitude, as I attempt to channel a more spiritual generosity toward the fall of humanity.

Train wrecks in slow motion and shootouts at the OK Corral, and the teeming crowds that always ogle them up-close or from a distance, some folks reaching out a helping hand, some frozen in terror or rabid with recrimination, and a lot of bystanders simply pointing fingers and saying “Ha! Good thing that ain't me. Sorry sucker!” Nothing quite like beholding the slapstick of another person's misery. There but for the grace of God.

MUGSHOT NATION

Sites like *Lane County Mugshots Uncensored* have sprung up everywhere around the country, in part as an opportunistic reaction to the collapse of public trust in traditional news sources. Piggybacking on the rise of social media, with its up-to-the-second immediacy and perpetual trolling, such sites subvert and complicate the stodgy paradigm of mainstream media, which in comparison moves with slow feet and an authoritative, often patronizing mono-voice wrapped in the prestige of professionalism.

In lieu of a single journalistic narrative, *LCMU* presents a clamor of voices competing for primacy in a free-for-all that mobs up, for better or worse, around those places where people fail: law breakers, drunk drivers, chronic fuck-ups, delinquents, tweakers, recidivists and freaks.

If *LCMU* is a news source, it's certainly a new kind of news source, a funneled mutinous howl from the hoi polloi that works like a form of hearsay from ground zero of a zero-sum game. Imagine if every single fan inside Autzen Stadium during a Ducks football game was given equal voice in coaching the team on field, and you get the idea of what would ensue. It might remain sport, but it wouldn't be very sporting.

Lane County Mugshots Uncensored, then, is where we all watch each other, and where the watchers watch the watchers watching. Beyond any question of civic or social value, the phenomenon is fascinating and a bit mindboggling, and in a not entirely cheerful way. It's like an inversion of the panopticon, a prison of totalized and perpetual surveillance. Instead of The Man keeping an eye on things, everybody is now up each other's ass.