



**SHELLY AND MIKE**

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHELLY CALHOUN-JONES

# On the Anniversary of the Thurston Shooting

MEMORIES OF MIKAEL NICKOLAUSON

**W**hat makes a hero? Some of the world's most successful people imagine themselves as heroes, working toward the goal of a better world all of their lives. Others, like the old saying about greatness, have heroics thrust upon them or have it exposed in one short, violent moment. Very few are born into it.

I'm going to tell you about one of my heroes. But first, let's set the scene.

I spent my childhood reading or creating things. I'd write stories, draw or play music. My mind looked inward — it helped me cope with the fact that my father wasn't a "dad." He struggled with inner demons, the same ones that he struggles with to this day. It was like walking on eggshells; anything you said could set him off.

I channeled anxiety into creative energy. My mind was usually in the clouds, building stories. When I was a teenager, I began to immerse myself in role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*.

By the time I was playing *Dungeons & Dragons*, I had left home and was living with my best friend. It was a tumultuous period. I had all the traits of a rebellious adolescent with what I now know to be trauma from a rough childhood.

I also didn't realize that playing a character in a game was actually teaching me valuable social skills and coping mechanisms.

Different character alignments taught morality and other perspectives. I also learned to have better communication skills, build empathy and work in a group setting.

I met one of my personal heroes around this time.

Mike was a gamer and ran a role-playing game during lunch period. It was an arena-style game where the players would sometimes fight monsters. Sometimes there would be a loose story, but mostly it was just chaotic fun.

Mike's parents were in a *Dungeons & Dragons* group before Mike was born. They had serious nerd cred. I still remember the first time I went to Mike's house and saw all of their computers. Note that it was the late '90s, so having four computers was unheard of.

We hit it off. I loved having a friend that I could be myself with. He had an incredible imagination and his D&D characters were always unassuming. One of my favorites of Mike's characters was John the Mage, a kid prankster constantly playing jokes on the party.

Mike was influenced by Douglas Adams, so there were lots of puns and jokes in his stories. His primary goal was to make sure everyone had an enjoyable experience and escaped from any troubles they had that day.

By senior year, we were inseparable. We'd pass notes back and forth; we even had a secret code only the we could read. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.

It's hard to write about someone who was naturally a private person. Mike hated having his picture taken; he was introverted.

In fact, I'm not even sure if he'd want to be the hero in this story.

In the cafeteria, the gamers sat near the band, drama and choir kids all at the same table. Our friends were a motley crew, but everyone was accepting. And Mike had his own stage. He could always immerse himself in the story.

At the end of my senior year, Mike passed away at that very table. I had gotten up to get us breakfast when one of our classmates came in from a side door shooting. After killing his parents the night before, the shooter raided his dad's gun collection and drove to Thurston. The shooter hit our table first.

I don't even think Mike knew what was happening. Several of my friends ended up in the hospital. I remember one classmate was covered in blood by trying to stop another classmate's wound. She was shot in the head, but made a miraculous recovery because of another hero's quick thinking.

After Mike died, all of our notes and character sheets went into a box that was later relocated to the family's garage. I kept one of his blankets that smelled like him and an old dice pouch.

The grief came in waves and I had intense nightmares. My best friend, Laura, was a rock during this time; it felt like the rug was pulled from under me. For those keeping count, that is a total of two personal heroes born that day.

Twenty years later, I still dream of Mike. Not the Mike that passed, but the Mike who was one of my best friends — his head in a book, his mind in the clouds, thinking of all the possibilities. I hope he reincarnated into his boy mage, generating beautiful chaos wherever he goes.

I miss you Mike.

*Shelly Calhoun-Jones is a cybersecurity professional who enjoys traveling, creating art and random tangents over coffee.*

## MCMANSIONS = EXTINCTION

We're living through the sixth mass extinction. We see this firsthand in Lane County. Oak savannah is the most endangered habitat in the United States.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife lists more than 27 species on its "strategy" list, meaning they have low or declining populations. Several of these are endangered.

Ken Rosenberg of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology describes "the top three threats to birds" as being "habitat loss, habitat loss and habitat loss." He says we're losing the battle for bird conservation "acre by acre."

In this context, a group of neighbors and I are fighting a multi-million dollar "McMansion" development project in our area. "The Vineyards at Gimpl Hill" describes itself as a selection of "gracious estates" for "secure, sophisticated country living ... the premier development in Lane County for discerning people."

This project will destroy or impact 80 acres of prime wildlife habitat home to deer, elk, bears, cougars, wild turkeys, bobcats and a wide variety of other species.

Destroying large areas of habitat and impacting the area with higher traffic and additional access roads is a course of action I cannot support. These ostentatious houses will cost millions, and the developer (Roy Carver) stands to make millions more.

On June 5, the Lane County Board of Commissioners will meet at 1:30 pm at the Lane County Public Service Building (125 E. 8th Avenue) to discuss. If you care about wildlife habitat in Lane County, please attend this meeting and speak out against this project.

*Max Wilbert  
Eugene*

## THE TRUMP THING

Dear fellow liberals: If you haven't educated yourself on history, politics and philosophy enough to know that Trump supporters are not a monolith, and all you want from your liberalism is to punch a Nazi, retweet some party line or vote for the next hot Dem, then stop giving yourself credit for caring and shut the fuck up.

*Ian Blumberg-Engel  
Eugene*

## HARSH TOKE

This is about *EW's* Cannabis issue, and "enforcement" of Idaho's fraudulent prohibition ("A Beacon of Green for Idaho," 5/3):

According to Vol. 16 of *American Jurisprudence*, fake laws enacted to commit fraud and other crimes "under the color of law" (like slavery, etc.) are "null and void, as if they never existed." Official conspiracies and "enforcement" of fraudulent laws are illegal acts of treason.

Government officials swear to protect the Constitution and citizens "from enemies, both foreign and domestic" (here and elsewhere). Police officers, prosecutors, judges and others who perpetuate prohibition of cannabis based on lies are guilty of treason, the worst of all felonies.

Yet, the death penalty seems too easy. Banishment seems unworkable. What's our best alternative to death by firing squad?