

OTHERWISE NICE?

I couldn't agree more with Michele Walter's letter entitled "Downgrading Rape" (*EW*, Aug. 16). Riding bicycles in Eugene does feel dangerous due to the incredible amount of transients that loiter or live along the paths. I particularly worry about being knocked over and robbed.

The amount of homeless, vagrant, drug and/or mentally disturbed individuals in this town is out of control. The library is beautiful, but my wife won't take our children there, as it is an acknowledged "day-time homeless shelter" and it frightens her in more ways than one. Hand sanitizer only goes so far.

I have written to the City Council and mayor asking when they are going to make public "camping" and panhandling illegal, but have never gotten a response. This problem is of epic proportions and completely ruins this otherwise nice small city.

David Campbell
Eugene

LEGAL SEMANTICS

In response to Michele Walter's letter ("Downgrading Rape," Aug. 16): As a frequent user of the bike paths and a woman, I completely agree that we need to make them safer. But part of her letter is factually incorrect and, well, facts matter — maybe now more than ever.

The term "Unlawful Sexual Penetration" (USP) is not a "downgrading" of a rape charge. USP and rape are different crimes, but both have the same sentencing guidelines and punishments. The charge is based on the facts of the individual case and does not in any way suggest that any agency is "downgrading a woman's value as a human being." It's not "barbaric."

THIS MODERN WORLD



Were the assailant prosecuted for rape when what he in fact committed was USP, a good defense attorney would have it reduced or even have his client cleared of charges and free before lunch. The charge is based on the victim's statements, not what word is going to make people feel better.

There is enough misinformation and "alternative facts" out there that I think it's important we avoid them if we want our views to be given credibility.

Karma Hunt
Eugene

CLIMATE CHANGE

Kudos and gratitude for your *Slant* last week (Aug. 23) on our current climate change realities. It is sobering.

In 22 years there will be no snow pack in our mountains; our oceans are souring (30 percent more acidic, think vinegar) and we can expect a 500 percent increase in Western wildfires as Oregon's population doubles. Extreme fires are caused by decades of mismanagement (fire suppression and clearcutting) and logging is not the answer, as some would have us believe.

We need to create a just transition to a clean-energy future that is fossil free. We

need economic justice for the communities hardest hit by decades of environmental racism. And we need it now

A tall order? Yes. Luckily, as with all big social changes, we the people are the ones to make it happen. Join the solidarity and resistance, with hundreds of communities across the nation, to "Rise for Climate, Jobs and Justice" from 1-3 pm Sept. 8 at Campbell Community Center. Meet your local change-makers and engage in actions that will create a carbon-free world, starting locally.

Communities will lead this transformation. Together we can do this! See you there!

Patty Hine, director
350Eugene

JIFFY POP FIELD

Now that they have completely removed any trace of the old Hayward Field, it looks like they used a scorched-earth policy. Maybe that's to make sure that no one protests anymore — hard to tell.

From what I've seen of the proposed design of the new stadium, there is no trace of the original grandstands design. In fact, the new design looks more like a Jiffy Pop pan than anything related to Hayward.

So I'm going to recommend that the new stadium be christened Jiffy Pop Field. Just don't call it Hayward Field.

Hayward Field was destroyed and got hauled off in a bunch of trash trucks.

Scott MacWilliams
Eugene

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Occasionally, this paper has done something that rises to the level of good jour-

VIEWPOINT BY TARA MARIE

The North Springfield Serial Rapist

THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE NIGHTMARE, A YOUNG VICTIM THANKS SURVIVORS, PARENTS AND POLICE

I woke up to a stranger hovering over my bed. His hand clamped over my mouth. "Don't scream. There's nobody home to help you," he hissed, and brandished a knife.

Thirty years ago this summer a serial rapist began his reign of terror in north Springfield. From 1988 to 1993 over a dozen rapes and attempted rapes of young girls and teenagers were reported in my community. Springfield girls and parents lived in a virtual prison of fear, not knowing when the unidentified predator would strike next.

Most of the attacks followed a similar pattern. In the predawn darkness he entered the home of his victim through an unlocked window or door. In many cases parents were asleep in another room. The young victim would awaken to a man with a knife. Although one attack occurred in a grassy field as two girls walked home from McDonald's, that case was an exception to the pattern. Most of the victims were from ages 9 to 16.

Indeed my family's life changed in many ways after the north Springfield rapist began his crime spree. My late mother was a single parent working at the post of-

rice. My sister and I were 11 and 13 at the time. My mom and perhaps most Springfield parents lived in a constant state of high alert, trying to raise kids with a pedophile on the loose.

I remember when a reporter from *The Register Guard* interviewed my mother. "I can't leave my kids home alone," she told him. "It's like when they were babies!"

As a teenager, I was pretty oblivious to my mother's struggle. My top priorities were making the eighth grade basketball team and buying a "Don't Worry, Be Happy" record. In retrospect, I realize my mom put on a brave face, but in fact she (and probably most mothers in my community) suffered a lot during those years.

The nightmare ended in late 1995 when a local man was arrested on unrelated sex crimes. A DNA test linked him to several of the Springfield rapes. Michael Clifton Owen, a Eugene-Springfield native, was a 31-year-old inconspicuous neighbor who lived among us. He confessed to being the north Springfield rapist.

In June 1996 many of Owen's victims (we were young women by that time) attended his sentencing at the Lane County courthouse. Several of us testified. As a 20-year-

old college student, I did not know it was quite rare for victims of sexual abuse to see their perpetrator put behind bars. According to RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network), out of 1,000 rapes, only six perpetrators will be convicted of a felony and sent to prison.

Due in part to our testimony, Owen was sentenced to 130 years.

Three decades on, my brave mother has passed; neighbors moved away; police have retired. Is it too little, too late to say thank you? I want to express gratitude to my heroes, detectives John King and John Umenhofer of the Springfield police, and to the courageous parents who lived in north Springfield at that time.

Most of all, a sincere thank you to the survivors of Owen's crimes because our actions have ensured that he will never hurt another child again.

Finally, thank you to Bernardo for your viewpoint in *Eugene Weekly* (7/19). Your story inspired me to write this piece. ■

"Tara Marie," a pseudonym, is a teacher and married with two children. Because she was a minor when she was raped, *EW* is protecting her anonymity.