



Stanislaus CONNECTIONS

Working for peace, justice and a sustainable environment

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“Nuns on the Bus” visit Modesto

By DAN ONORATO

On June 17 a lively, energetic, and determined busload of Catholic nuns brought their message urging comprehensive immigration reform to Congressman Jeff Denham's office in Modesto. A crowd of nearly 50 local activists, including some from the Modesto Peace/Life Center, greeted them appreciatively. On their three-week journey that started on the East coast in late May, they visited Congressional representatives in 16 states

Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace that educates, organizes and lobbies for economic and social transformation.

In the summer of 2012, NETWORK captured media attention when they organized their first “Nuns on the Bus” tour. In this journey through nine states, the nuns protested the effects of cuts to federal safety-net spending proposed by Congressman Paul Ryan.

On this trip NETWORK promotes reform that ensures family unity; protects the rights of immigrant workers; speeds up the processing of already-approved immigrants; acknowledges our borders are already secure, with only minor changes needed; enhances the present diversity visa program; and provides a clear, direct path to citizenship.

ACTION: Network urges everyone to write your Members of Congress TODAY with a personalized message saying that as a constituent you expect them to continue America's long-standing tradition of welcoming newcomers into the American family. For more info about NETWORK, see www.networklobby.org.



and ended in San Francisco on June 18. Their constant message to all citizens is urgent: “The time is NOW to tell your lawmakers that people of faith support compassionate immigration reform that reflects our American and faith values.”

The Nuns on the Bus is a campaign of NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby founded by 47 Catholic Sisters more than 40 years ago. NETWORK is a

Make Big Brother Our Friend

By STEVE WEISSMAN,
Reader Supported News

The article below is satire.

What if we're wrong? What if the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the Constitution permits massive surveillance and unlimited data mining, as revealed by former National Security Agency technician Edward Snowden?

In a less absurd world, those who communicate electronically might expect a right to privacy, as the Supreme Court established in 1967 in *Katz v. United States*, which required state and federal governments to go to court, show probable cause of criminal activity, and obtain a specific warrant to execute a wiretap, well within the letter and spirit of the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable searches and seizures.

Inevitably, it seems, such freedom was short-lived. In 1979, the Court gave law enforcement the power to collect without warrant the numbers we called and those that called us, and passage of the Patriot Act in 2001 and subsequent amendments now lets NSA scoop up as many as 3 billion individual telephone and email communications a day, store the “meta-data,” possibly forever, and continue to mine them to uncover patterns and connections far beyond anything possible only a few years ago. Welcome to the worst dystopian nightmares

of Franz Kafka, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell.

Snowden tells us that individual analysts can use the meta-data to call up, listen to, or read the full content of the communications. President Barack Obama, Senator Diane Feinstein, and NSA director General Keith Alexander all tell us that Snowden is wrong, but offer no hard evidence to back up their

claims. Whom should we believe?

Clearly, our rapidly expanding technology requires new legal thinking and systemic protections hard-wired into the computer code to leave an audit trail of who has accessed the information and for what purpose, as Professor Lawrence Lessig has suggested: <http://billmoyers.com/episode/full-show-big-brother's-prying-eyes/>

As far as we know, NSA has no safeguards like that, and the cur-

rent cases filed by the ACLU and Electronic Freedom Foundation may never force anything similar. Even scarier, a Constitutional judgment could turn out to be worse than nothing. As former chief justice Charles Evans Hughes put it in the bluntest possible terms, “the Constitution is what the judges say it is.” Chief Justice John G. Roberts and his eight unaccountable associates get to decide, and a majority of them could easily call the

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Remember Hiroshima on August 6th — Daniel Ellsberg to speak at Livermore

Join the Modesto Peace/Life Center's Annual Hiroshima Remembrance and Potluck at Legion Park, Modesto on Tuesday, August 6th at 6:30 PM. Bring food and drinks to share as we converse and rededicate ourselves to reversing the efforts to rebuild and proliferate nuclear weapons. The evening will conclude with a candlelight vigil on the banks of the Tuolumne River.

From Tri-Valley CAREs:

Unfinished Business and our most Urgent Responsibility: Banning the Bomb at the Livermore Lab and Globally: DANIEL ELLSBERG, FEATURED SPEAKER

Sixty-eight years after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, the threat of nuclear annihilation remains. Nuclear devastation could come by accident, miscalculation, madness or malevolent intent. Events like Fukushima demonstrate the dangers of nuclear technologies derived from the bomb. And, while instructions on how to "duck and cover" to survive a nuclear bomb may seem quaint, modern propaganda still blinds many to our most urgent and unfinished business: the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

We ask all who seek peace and justice to come to Livermore Lab on August 6 for a rally with musicians, speakers, Taiko drummers and more. Immediately following will be a short march and nonviolent direct action at the West Gate. We will gather at the location where U.S. nuclear weapons scientists are developing the world's first so-called "interoperable" warhead to warhead to deliver annihilation interchangeably from land or sea.

WHAT: Hiroshima Commemoration, Rally and Action, Daniel Ellsberg, Keynote speaker

WHEN: Tuesday, August 6, 2013, 7 AM program, 8:15 AM march

WHERE: Gather at Livermore Lab northwest corner, at Vasco & Patterson Pass Roads

PARKING: There will be parking set up along Patterson Pass Road

BART: Van pick-ups at the Dublin-Pleasanton BART Station. Must call to reserve a spot.

DETAILS: (925) 443-7148 or (510) 839-5877, www.trivalleycares.org or www.wslfweb.org

Cosponsored by American Friends Service Committee, Asian Americans for Peace & Justice, Ecumenical Peace Institute, Livermore Conversion Project, Mt. Diablo Peace & Justice Center, No Nukes Action Committee, Peace Action West, Physicians for Social Responsibility Bay Area Chapter, Tri-Valley CAREs and Western States Legal Foundation. Additional co-sponsors welcome.

Tri-Valley CAREs Files Federal Lawsuit to Compel Release of Information About Nuclear Weapons Activities at Livermore Lab

Edited from Tri-Valley CAREs

LIVERMORE & OAKLAND, CA – Today [6/6/2013], Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment) filed a Federal lawsuit in United States District Court for the Northern District of California against the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) and its National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) for numerous failures to comply with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which requires federal agencies to respond to public requests for information within 20 days.

According to the complaint filed today in US District Court, Tri-Valley CAREs alleges five separate instances the DOE and NNSA failed to provide responsive, unclassified documents regarding operations at the agencies' Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) as required by law. The information that is the subject of the litigation is overdue by time periods between one and two years.

"The DOE and NNSA are egregiously out of compliance with the law," noted Tri-Valley CAREs' Staff Attorney, Scott Yundt. "This frustrates the public's basic right to know. The information is of urgent importance to the community, and involves important and timely issues like Livermore Lab's plan to use plutonium in the National Ignition Facility and proposed shipments of plutonium bomb cores to Livermore from Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico."

"As a 'watchdog' organization, Tri-Valley CAREs relies on open government laws like the FOIA to do its work and inform the community," stated Yundt. "By dragging its feet for years, and not providing the requested information, the government has not only violated the law but has potentially degraded the value of the information sought, which is often

time-sensitive," Yundt added. "In some cases, important opportunities for public input have elapsed and projects have gone forward while the group's information requests went unanswered."

"Many of the documents Tri-Valley CAREs requested contain information about the dangers faced by our com-



munity from spills, accidents, releases. Keeping this information hidden does nothing to protect the public," charged Marylia Kelley, the group's Executive Director. "Instead, it robs the community of the opportunity to press for changes that would better safeguard worker and public health and the environment."

Kelley continued, "Moreover, DOE and NNSA are illegally withholding detailed information we requested about worker exposures."

The group's lawsuit asks the judge to issue a court order appointing a Special Counsel to investigate the pattern of abuse wherein DOE and NNSA fail to comply with the law. Information: contact Scott Yundt, Staff Attorney, Tri-Valley CAREs, (415) 990-2070 Marylia Kelley, Executive Director, Tri-Valley CAREs, (925) 443-7148; For the complete article, visit <http://www.trivalleycares.org>

Can you help with MoFest!7?

MoFest!7 is coming to the Gallo Center for the Arts 9/20 and PFLAG needs your help: Become a sponsor or donor; find the donation form and quick PayPal donation at <http://pflag-modesto.org/mofest7.html>

SAVE THE DATE: Fantastic Peace/Life Center Rummage Sale!

October 3, 2013: We are looking for donations of nice items that people might want to buy. If you would like to donate items, please contact the Center and leave a message, 529-5750, or contact Shelly Scribner, 521-6304, shellys833@aol.com. Exact location TBD.

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The times, they are a-changin'

By **BILL DOTINGA**, president PFLAG Modesto

Since we last met in these ether waves and printed pages, the United States Supreme Court heard arguments on the pros and cons of same-sex marriage. Rhode Island and Maryland became the 10th and 11th states, respectively, to legalize marriage equality.

And as I've been writing this, Minnesota became the 12th. Illinois is on the way. That means that a quarter of the states in this nation, it's legal to marry the person you love—regardless of what genitalia he or she possesses.

Isn't that what it comes down to? It's tough to buy the other argument—the "sanctity" of marriage—when more than half of all straight marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. While there's a lack of hard data to support that figure, we can extrapolate: In most states, annual divorces are just over half the number of annual marriages.

If it were that sacrosanct, those who rally against same-sex marriage would do something about that.

I confess that my views on the subject have evolved right along with America's. Not that long ago, I didn't think the government had any business recognizing marriage period. A religious thing or a private contract between two people—the government doesn't have a place dictating the terms of either.

But in the last five years, I've come to understand that the government's been in the marriage business for so long that it's never getting out. Our entire tax code is based on married or single. So are social security and Medicare. Every aspect

of the federal government's taking and giving is predicated on the marital status of its citizens.

To undo this in favor of some Libertarian utopia is an impossible dream. For one, legally married straight couples would never stand for it. Imagine suddenly being faced with having to use the paltry standard deduction with a single exemption on the 1040EZ. Or only getting the single rate on social security checks. Or not getting the exemption from the federal estate tax when a spouse passes away.

At last count, there are 1,138 benefits, rights and protections granted by the federal government to straight married couples. The Human Rights Campaign has compiled an excellent overview of some of the biggies, which you can check out here: <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/an-overview-of-federal-rights-and-protections-granted-to-married-couples>

So if the earth suddenly shifts on its axis and the U.S. government one day said, "We no longer sanction or recognize marriage of any kind," what would happen?

Pitchforks and ax handles. The Boston Tea Party and the Whiskey Rebellion. I'm talking about a revolution.

Before we meet again in these pages, nine justices of the U.S. Supreme Court will have made some sort of decision on the fate of same-sex marriage at the federal level. I've read the transcripts and listened to their questions during oral arguments. I don't have the foggiest idea what they'll decide. They spent so little time asking about important things—like equal protection and equal application of the law—and lot more time wondering whether they even had jurisdiction to hear the case. In other words, they whined about having to decide the issue at all.

And who can blame them? Who wants to be tasked with ticking off the Religious Right and the Elite Left all at once? Who wants to decide the lives and fates of millions with a pair of legal opinions?

Whatever their decision, we still have work to do. A poll earlier this year found that 58 percent of Americans think same-sex couples should be allowed to marry—twice the level of support 20 years ago. Allies of LGBT people are part of that massive societal shift, preaching the message of acceptance and equality to your own friends and families.

If the justices decide to continue discrimination against same-sex couples, it will be up to us to continue pushing society toward equality. If they strike down DOMA and all marriages become equal in the eyes of the government, our task remains the same: there will be a lot of people—at least 42 percent of America—that will be profoundly unhappy with that decision.

And it will be up to all of us to bring them on board.

http://pflagmodesto.org/images/June_2013_PFLAG_News_Views.pdf

Ed note: As we go to press, the US Supreme overturned DOMA, and returned the case of Proposition 8 to the California court.

Evidence does not support fears of Islam in the West

By **JOCELYNE CESARI**

Washington, DC – While scholarly work has debunked the idea of incompatibility of Islam with Western values, it has not really changed this dominant perception pervading political discourse and policy making. This notion of incompatibility between Islam and the West has actually intensified in the last 15 years, as the perception of Islam as the external enemy has combined with the fear of Islam within liberal Western democracies. The consequence is that Muslims are now seen by many as an internal and external enemy both in Europe and in the United States.

The persistence of the Islam versus West dichotomy has nothing to do with the quality of academic work, but rather the fact that this work is seldom utilized by political and cultural actors, not to mention media.

Yet hope may lie in better understanding the social and cultural reality of Muslims that starkly contradicts the perceived divide – namely that Muslims in the West are supportive of Western values and civic integration. In this regard, efforts could be made to familiarize citizens with this reality through different educational and cultural means.

My book, *Why the West Fears Islam: Exploration of Islam in Western Liberal Democracies* (June 2013, Palgrave Macmillan), indicates a persistent predisposition in the West to link Islam to un-civic behaviour and to see assertive Muslims as internal enemies threatening national values and identities as well as external enemies at war with Western civilization.

Intriguingly, there is no empirical evidence based on behaviors of Muslims in European countries or the United States that supports this fear. Actually, Muslim political practices are not different from their average fellow citizens. My investigation shows that in Europe and in the United States, Muslims express a greater trust in national institutions and democracy than their fellow citizens and that mosque attendance actually facilitates social and political integration.

Still, the construction of Muslims as the enemy within liberal democracies takes place in a preexisting environment influenced by history, adding the dimension of an internal enemy to the enduring feature of the external enemy.

Muslims have been seen as "others" to the West since medieval times. More specifically, Western self-definition based on the concepts of progress, nation, rational individual and secularization was built in opposition to Muslim empires. Europe's relationship with the Ottoman Empire gradually established the East-West binary that had a decisive impact on world politics since the 19th Century.

In the United States, during the 20th and 21st Centuries, the perception of Islam as the external enemy traces back to the Iranian Hostage Crisis (1979 to 1981) and became more acute after 9/11 when Muslims came to be seen as internal enemies due to the fear of home grown terrorism.

Many Muslims in post-WWII Europe have an immigrant

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Parents, Families, and
Friends of Lesbians
and Gays

Cooking with Solar!

By JENIFER WEST

Our solar oven, an SOS Sport, arrived recently, and we've enjoyed some great meals from it so far. It came with two Granite Ware cooking pots, plus a little gadget for pasteurizing water, and a regular oven thermometer. It's so cool, cooking an entire meal without using fuel – we simply make use of a few of the billions of sunrays that bombard the earth every day!

The concept of solar ovens has been around for awhile, and many different styles have been designed, but all use the same principle: concentrating sunlight into an insulated box containing a cooking vessel. Fortunately, these wonderful devices are now being used in places where cooking fuel is scarce, which means that trees (if any exist) don't need to be cut down for cooking, nor do people need to search for dung or other fuel to cook the family meals – and inhale noxious smoke in the process. Closer to home, solar ovens can mean saving on utility costs and cooking more flavorful food, increasing self reliance and lessening our impact on the environment, to boot. Plus, it's just plain fun!

Food is generally put into a solar oven between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m. I missed it by about a half-hour the first time, but it still went fine. Everything went in at about 10:00, and soon the oven had heated up to 150. (The minimum temperature for cooking is 180.) I was a little leery of that low temperature, so I re-aimed the oven to point at the sun more directly. It soon heated up to a safer 190.

Sometime between 2:30 and 3:00, our meal was done! Wow – even my skeptical husband was amazed, when we opened up the pots. Perfectly cooked potatoes and falling-off-the-bone ribs!! Even the good old crock pot can't hold a candle to this baby! We made a meatloaf and brown rice next, and learned that a solar oven is definitely not the way to cook brown rice – unless you like it gummy! But otherwise, the flavors and textures that come from cooking in a solar oven just can't be beat.

Baked goods are usually put in between 10:00 am and

12:00 pm – although I've started a loaf of bread, using the reflectors, at 9:00. And I recently put a couple of pans of brownies in at about 1:30 (on the roof at work, no less!), which were done around 3:00. Just the cure for the Monday-at-the-office blues!

Surprisingly, no water is added – even if you're "hard boiling" eggs! The exceptions are things that need to be re-hydrated, like grains and beans. Or if you're making soup, of course, but even then, you add as little as possible. Yet, because things are basically steam-cooked, at relatively low temperatures, they come out incredibly moist and tender – with virtually no sticking. Which leads to another great thing about solar cooking: The "clean-up" factor: things don't usually get burned on. Just a quick rinse with some soapy water, and a light scrub with a non-scratch pad (I use a section of the bags that oranges or onions come in) is all it takes to clean up the pots.

Solar ovens can be used to cook just about anything, from the aforementioned ribs, potatoes and eggs, to bacon, a nice batch of beans, or a Sunday roast! The only requirements are a sunny day, dark cookware and adequate time. Although I chose to order my oven online, they can be made fairly inexpensively. I attempted that at first, but got stuck trying to figure out how to make the reflectors – geometry has never exactly been my strong suit. So after thinking about it for several years, I gave away the one I'd been working on, and ordered the SOS Sport. I plan to use it as much as possible, because it's so much fun, and so easy to use. Now, I've got my eye the Rolls Royce of solar ovens – the All American Sun Oven. Unlike the SOS Sport, which is made of plastic and reaches 250 – 275 at maximum, the All American Sun Oven is made a little more ruggedly, and the literature indicates it can heat up to 350 – 400. The cooking chamber is also larger – it can even accommodate a 15-pound turkey! If and when we do invest in one, I'll be sure to share how it works out.

In the meantime, I would encourage anyone to investigate the exciting world of solar cooking!



LETTER: Overpopulation

Border Security, Climate Change, Terrorism and Wars! These issues are always in the news, but overpopulation is rarely mentioned. I have mentioned it to others but they seem reluctant to believe it's a problem. The world population is over 7 billion and growing. As a result, the earth's ability to sustain most forms of life is fast diminishing. Oceans are being over fished to the point of species extinction. The negative effects of climate change on the food and water supplies as well as the competition for diminishing natural resources are causing conflicts worldwide. A lot of the wars, being blamed on religious factions are actually over arable land and water. Big Oil is going after oil and gas deposits that are much harder to extract, endangering drinking water supplies and increasing CO 2 emissions.

Most seem to believe this way of life can continue on. Those in power know it won't and they are preparing. Congress is passing laws restricting our freedoms and building big walls with guards at our borders. The threat of "Terrorism" is used to justify these actions. Why is the Government spending \$1.4 Trillion dollars per year to "protect our freedoms" while passing laws that unconstitutionally restrict them?

As with any other species, when the food supply is drastically reduced, the population will also decline. I can only hope we come up with a better solution.

Bill Warner
Ceres, CA

Big Brother

from page 1

current "ca ca" Constitutional.

What, then, do we do?

At the risk of going satirical, let me suggest a way forward. If President Barack Obama can embrace Big Brother as his enduring legacy, if he can describe the super-secret workings of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court as "transparent," and if he can call himself "Bush-Cheney Lite," why not grow up, get real, and follow in his soiled footsteps? Why not put Big Brother to better use?

1. Let Big Brother end Washington's gridlock. Former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who knew something of these matters, used to keep dossiers on everyone from yours truly to Martin Luther King Jr. to President Lyndon B. Johnson. This was why LBJ kept Hoover in office, saying that it was better to have him on the inside of the tent pissing out than on the outside of the tent pissing in. NSA records make Hoover's collection seem quaint. I wonder how many Tea-Party Republicans in Congress have long trails of telephone calls and emails to their lovers, male or female, or credit card purchases for expensive gifts. Just a mention of this information would go a long way to getting difficult legislation passed.

2. Use Big Brother against Big Money. Much of Wall Street's wealth and power comes from their access to inside information that the rest of us do not have, cannot get, and cannot act upon in a timely way. Prosecutors do not find most of this inside information illegal and rarely bring cases to court. They say they find it too hard to secure evidence


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Multiple New Polls Show Americans Reject Wholesale NSA Domestic Spying

BY MARK M. JAYCOX AND TREVOR TIMM,
The Electronic Frontier Foundation

In the 1950s and 60s, the NSA spied on all telegrams entering and exiting the country. The egregious actions were only uncovered after Congress set up an independent investigation called the Church Committee in the 1970s after Watergate. When the American public learned about NSA's actions, they demanded change. And the Church Committee delivered it by providing more information about the programs and by curtailing the spying. [<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2013/06/response-nsa-we-need-new-church-commission-and-we-need-it-now>]

Just like the American public in the 1970s, Americans in the 2010s know that when the government amasses dossiers on citizens, it's neither good for security nor for privacy. And a wide range of polls this week show widespread concern among the American people over the new revelations about NSA domestic spying.

Yesterday, the Guardian released a comprehensive poll showing widespread concern about NSA spying. Two-thirds of Americans think the NSA's role should be reviewed. The poll also showed Americans demanding accountability and more information from public officials—two key points of our recently launched stopwatching.us campaign.

But there's more. So far, Gallup has one of the better-worded questions, finding that 53% of Americans disapprove of the NSA spying. A CBS poll also showed that a majority—at 58%—of Americans disapprove of the government “collecting phone records of ordinary Americans.” And Rasmussen—though sometimes known for push polling—also recently conducted a poll showing that 59% of Americans

are opposed to the current NSA spying.

The only poll showing less than a majority on the side of government overreach was Pew Research Center, which asked Americans whether it was acceptable that the NSA obtained “secret court orders to track the calls of millions of Americans to investigate terrorism.” Pew reported that 56% of

Americans said it was “acceptable.” But the question is poorly worded. It doesn't mention the widespread, dragnet nature of the spying. It also neglects to describe the “information” being given—metadata, which is far more sensitive and can provide far more information than just the ability to “track the calls” of Americans. And it was conducted early on in the scandal, before it was revealed that the NSA doesn't even have to obtain court orders to search already collected information.

Despite the aggregate numbers, many of the polls took place at the same time Americans were finding

out new facts about the program. More questions must be asked. And if history is any indication, the American people will be finding out much more. Indeed, just today the Guardian reported that its working on a whole new series with even more NSA revelations about spying.

One thing is definitely clear: the American public is demanding answers and needs more information. That's why Congress must create a special investigatory committee to reveal the full extent of the programs. Democracy demands it. Go here to take action: https://action.eff.org/o/9042/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=9260

What is Metadata and why does it matter? Visit: <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2013/06/why-metadata-matters>

Read the full Church Committee Report here: http://www.aarclibrary.org/publib/contents/church/contents_church_reports.htm

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) is a member-supported organization that fights for your privacy and digital civil liberties. Visit <https://www.eff.org>

Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act

Section 215 allows for secret court orders to collect “tangible things” that could be relevant to a government investigation – a far lower threshold and more expansive reach than a warrant based on probable cause. The list of possible “tangible things” the government can obtain is seemingly limitless, and could include everything from driver's license records to Internet browsing patterns. [from the Electronic Frontier Foundation.]

Full Text of the Patriot Act: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107_cong_bills&docid=f:h3162enr.txt.pdf



NSA can listen whenever it wants

From A CNET report

“The National Security Agency has acknowledged in a new classified briefing that it does not need court authorization to listen to domestic phone calls, a participant said.

“Rep. Jerrold Nadler, a New York Democrat, disclosed on Thursday that during a secret briefing to members of Congress, he was told that the contents of a phone call could be accessed “simply based on an analyst deciding that.”

“If the NSA wants “to listen to the phone,” an analyst's decision is sufficient, without any other legal authorization required, Nadler said he learned. “I was rather startled,” said Nadler, an attorney and congressman who serves on the House Judiciary committee.”

Read the full article at: http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-57589495-38/nsa-spying-flap-extends-to-contents-of-u.s-phone-calls/

Big Brother

from page 4

that would convince a jury. Well, not anymore. With all those NSA records, the odds are overwhelming that prosecutors could find discussions between major Wall Street players and corporate leaders, along with the time-coded computerized buying and selling based on those communications.

3. Have Big Brother eat Monsanto. One of the more delicious secrets to emerge from Wikileaks was the enormous effort of U.S. diplomats to help Monsanto sell its genetically modified seeds against the vocal opposition of European consumers and several European governments. How do we explain it? Easy. Just write a simple algorithm to trace every one of NSA's saved phone call and email from people at Monsanto to influential people in government. Big Brother will completely eliminate any need for conspiracy theories.

4. Let Big Brother solve climate change. For several years prior to November 2009, climate scientists agreed in overwhelming numbers that our planet was warming and

BIG BROTHER
is watching you

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
@QuoteDigest.com

that humans added to the problem by burning fossil fuels. The debate then took a dramatic turn when the ubiquitous Wikileaks published thousands of files and emails that one or more computer hackers had surreptitiously copied from the Climate Research Unit of the University of East Anglia in Britain. According to polling data and other evidence, this Climate Gate data dump and the right-wing spin put on it significantly reduced U.S. and international support for efforts to restrict the emission of greenhouse gases. NSA records might well help us discover who stole that data, how major players like Exxon Mobil and Charles and David Koch were able to make such good use of it, and how the climate deniers continue to operate.

5. Use the massive surveillance and data mining to weaken the American Empire. If the United States has a major advantage in dealing with our European allies, it is our dominance of the new digital economy. If we have a major disadvantage, it is how our digital dominance threatens personal privacy, which Europeans value far more than we do. Snowden's revelations make this conflict all the more pressing, and are already complicating incipient negotiations for a trans-Atlantic free trade pact.

These five suggestions are 100% satire, which I offer to dramatize how loosely-wired and out-of-control our surveillance and data mining system continue to be. I can't wait to see your suggestions for how we could put Big Brother to use.

A veteran of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the New Left monthly Ramparts, Steve Weissman lived for many years in London, working as a magazine writer and television producer. He now lives in France, where he is researching a new book, “Big Money: How Global Banks, Corporations, and Speculators Rule and How To Break Their Hold.”

From Reader Supported News: <http://readersupported-news.org/opinion/277-75/18055-focus-make-big-brother-our-friend>

Our Twisted Politics of Grief: In the “endless war,” some kinds of grief are more useful than others

By NORMAN SOLOMON

Darwin observed that conscience is what most distinguishes humans from other animals. If so, grief isn't far behind. Realms of anguish are deeply personal—yet prone to expropriation for public use, especially in this era of media hyper-spin. Narratives often thresh personal sorrow into political hay. More than ever, with grief marketed as a civic commodity, the personal is the politicized.

The politicizing of grief exploded in the wake of 9/11. When so much pain, rage and fear set the U.S. cauldron to boil, national leaders promised their alchemy would bring unalloyed security. The fool's gold standard included degrading civil liberties and pursuing a global war effort that promised to be ceaseless. From the political outset, some of the dead and bereaved were vastly important, others insignificant. Such routine assumptions have remained implicit and intact.

The “war on terror” was built on two tiers of grief. Momentous and meaningless. Ours and theirs. The domestic politics of grief settled in for a very long haul, while perpetual war required the leaders of both major parties to keep affirming and reinforcing the two tiers of grief.

For individuals, actual grief is intimate, often ineffable. Maybe no one can help, but expressions of caring and condolences can matter. So, too, can indifference. Or worse. The first years of the 21st century normalized U.S. warfare in countries where civilians kept dying and American callousness seemed to harden. From the USA, a pattern froze and showed no signs of thawing; denials continued to be reflexive, while expressions of regret were perfunctory or nonexistent.

Drones became a key weapon—and symbol—of the U.S. war trajectory. With a belated nod to American public opinion early in the century's second decade, Washington's interest in withdrawing troops from Afghanistan did not reflect official eagerness to stop killing there or elsewhere. It did reflect eagerness to bring U.S. warfare more into line with the latest contours of domestic politics. The allure of remote-control devices like drones—integral to modern “counterterrorism” ideas at the Pentagon and CIA—has been enmeshed in the politics of grief. So much better theirs than ours.

Many people in the United States don't agree with a foreign policy that glories in use of drones, cruise missiles and the like, but such disagreement is in a distinct minority. (A New York Times/CBS poll in late April 2013 found Americans favoring U.S. overseas drone strikes by 70 to 20 percent.) With the “war on terror” a longtime fact of political life, even skeptics or unbelievers are often tethered to some concept of pragmatism that largely privatizes misgivings. In the context of political engagement—when a person's internal condition is much less important than outward behavior—notions of realism are apt to encourage a willing suspension of disbelief. As a practical matter, we easily absorb the dominant U.S.

politics of grief, further making it our politics of grief.

The amazing technology of “unmanned aerial vehicles” glided forward as a satellite-guided *deus ex machina* to help lift Uncle Sam out of a tight geopolitical spot—exerting awesome airpower in Afghanistan and beyond while slowing the arrival of flag-draped coffins back home. More airborne killing and less boot prints on the ground meant fewer U.S. casualties. All the better to limit future grief, as much as possible, to those who are not us.

However facile or ephemeral the tributes may be at times, American casualties of war and their grieving families receive some public affirmation from government officials and

news media. The suffering had real meaning. They mattered and matter. That's our grief. But at the other end of American weaponry, their grief is a world of difference.

In U.S. politics, American sorrow is profoundly important and revs up many rhetorical engines; the contrast with sorrow caused by the American military could hardly be greater.

What is not ignored or dismissed as

mere propaganda is just another unfortunate instance of good intentions gone awry. No harm intended, no foul. Yet consider these words from a Pakistani photographer, Noor Behram, describing the aftermath of a U.S. drone attack: “There are just pieces of flesh lying around after a strike. You can't find bodies. So the locals pick up the flesh and curse America. They say that America is killing us inside our own country, inside our own homes, and only because we are Muslims.”

A memorable moment in the film *Lincoln* comes when the president says, “Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other.” A daring leap for a white American assessing race in 1865. Truly applying the same Euclidean theorem to grief would be just as daring now in U.S. politics. Let's face it: in the American political culture of our day, all grief is not created equal. Not even close.

We might say 'twas ever thus: countries and ethnic groups mourn their own while yawning or even rejoicing at the agonies of some “others.” And when grief weighs in on the U.S. political scale, the heaviness of our kind makes any other secondary at best. No wonder presidents have always been wary of red-white-and-blue coffins at Andrews Air Force Base. No wonder “Bring our troops home” is such an evergreen slogan of antiwar activism. If the only grief that matters much is American, then just getting Americans out of harm's way is the ticket. The demand—like empathy for the war-torn grief of Americans—is vital. And grievously incomplete.

The world's only superpower has been operating with vast impunity to strike targets and, in effect, summarily execute. (President Obama's big speech on May 23 reasserted that prerogative; as the ACLU's president Anthony Romero pointed out, Obama “still claims broad authority to carry

out targeted killings far from any battlefield, and there is still insufficient transparency.”) For American politics and mass media—perennially infatuated with the Pentagon's latest tech advances in military capacities—such enormous power to smite presumptive evildoers has fed into a condition of jingo-narcissism. Some of its manifestations could be viewed as sociopathic: unwilling or unable to acknowledge, or evidently care much about, the pain of others.

Or the terror of others, if we are causing it. In the American political lexicon, terror—the keynote word for justifying the U.S. state of warfare so far in this century—is a supreme epithet, taken as ours to confer and to withhold. Meanwhile, by definition, it goes without saying, our leaders of the “war on terror” do not terrorize. Yet consider these words from New York Times reporter David Rohde, recalling his captivity by the Taliban in 2009 in tribal areas of Pakistan: “The drones were terrifying. From the ground, it is impossible to determine who or what they are tracking as they circle overhead. The buzz of a distant propeller is a constant reminder of imminent death.” 1

As part of tacit job descriptions, the U.S. network anchor or the president is highly selective in displayed compassion for the grieving. It won't do to be seen with watery eyes when the Pentagon has done the killing (“friendly fire” a notable exception). No rulebook need be published, no red lines openly promulgated; the gist remains powerfully inherent and understood. If well acculturated, we don't need to ask for whom the bell tolls; we will be informed in due course. John Donne, meet Orwell and Pavlov.

The U.S. Constitution—if not international law or some tenacious kind of idealism—could prevent presidential “kill lists” from trumping due process. But, as Amy Davidson wrote in a New Yorker online column last year, the operative approach is: “it's due process if the president thinks about it.” Stephen Colbert summed up: “The Founders weren't picky. Trial by jury, trial by fire, rock-paper-scissors—who cares?” After all, “Due process just means there's a process that you do.” Satire from Colbert has been far more candid than oratory from President Obama, whose May 23 speech claimed a commitment to “due process” and declared: “I've insisted on strong oversight of all lethal action.”

Bypassing due process and shrugging off the human consequences go hand in hand. At the same time, it can be reassuring when the commander in chief speaks so well. But Obama's lengthy speech at the National Defense University laid out a global picture with a big missing piece: grief due to U.S. military attacks. The only mention was a fleeting understatement (“for the families of those civilians, no words or legal construct can justify their loss”), instantly followed by a focus on burdens of top perpetrators: “For me, and those in my chain of command, these deaths will haunt us as long as we live...” As usual, the grief of the USA's victims was quickly reframed in terms of American dilemmas, essential

The allure of remote-control devices like drones has been enmeshed in the politics of grief. So much better theirs than ours.

Grief

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goodness and standing in the world. So, while Obama's speech called for "addressing the underlying grievances and conflicts that feed extremism, from North Africa to South Asia," some crucial grievances stoking the conflicts were off the table from the outset; grief and rage caused by U.S. warfare remained out of the picture.

Transcendent and truly illuminating grief is to be found elsewhere, close to home. "The greatest country in the world" presumes to shoulder the greatest grief, with more access to profundities of death. No wailing and weeping at the scene of a drone strike, scarcely reported by U.S. media anyway, can hold a candle. For American grief to be only as weighty as any other just won't do. We're number one! A national narrative of emotional supremacy.

Our politics of grief, bouncing off the walls of U.S. media echo chambers, are apt to seem natural and immutable while fueling much of the domestic political rhetoric that drives U.S. foreign policy. The story goes that we're sinned against yet not sinning, engaged in self-protection, paying to defend ourselves. Consider the Google tallies for two phrases. "U.S. defense budget": nearly 4,000,000. "U.S. military budget": less than 100,000.

But for those in communities grieving the loss of people struck down by the USA's "Defense Department," the outlook is inverted. To be killed is bad enough. But to be killed with impunity? To be killed by a machine, from the sky, a missile fired by persons unseen who do not see who they're killing from hundreds or thousands of miles away? To be left to mourn for loved ones killed in this way?

When, from our vantage point, the grief of "others" lacks major verisimilitude, their resentment and rage appear irrational. Heaven forbid that such emotions could give rise to deadly violence approaching the level of our own. People who are uneducated and unclear on the American concept sometimes fail to appreciate that our perception is to be enforced as hegemonic reality. By a kind of fiat we can elevate with fervent validation some—some—others' grief. As for the rest, the gradations of importance of their grief, and the legitimacy of their resort to violence, are to be determined by our judicious assessment; for further information, contact the State Department.

There may be no worse feeling of human powerlessness than inability to prevent the death of a loved one. The unmatched power of bereavement forces people to cope with a basic kind of human algebra: love + death = grief. Whether felt as a sudden ghastly deluge or as a long series of sleeper waves with awful undertows, real grief can turn upbeat memories into mournful ones; remembering becomes a source of anguish, so that, as Joan Didion wrote, "Memories are what you no longer want to remember." Ultimately, intimately, the human conditions of loss often move people to places scarcely mapped by standard news coverage or political rhetoric.

Imagine living in a village in Pakistan or Afghanistan or Yemen. From the sky, death has been visited on neighbors, and drones keep hovering. (As now-former Times reporter

Rohde pointed out: "Drones fire missiles that travel faster than the speed of sound. A drone's victim never hears the missile that kills him.") Overhead are drones named Reaper, shooting missiles named Hellfire. Have the heavens been grabbed by people who think their instruments of death are godly?

"When scientific power outruns moral power," Martin Luther King Jr. said, "we end up with guided missiles and misguided men." For America, drones and other highest-tech weapons are a superb technological means of off-loading moral culpability from public agendas; on the surface, little muss, less fuss.

Disembodied killing offers plenty of pluses in U.S. politics, especially when wars become protracted. From Vietnam to Afghanistan, the reduction of troop levels has cut the number of American deaths (easing the grief that "counts") in tandem with more bombardment from the air (causing the "other" grief). Today's domestic politics of grief are akin to what emerged after mid-1969, when President Nixon initiated a steady withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam. During the three years that followed, Nixon reduced the number of soldiers in Vietnam by nearly half a million, to 69,000. During the same three years, the U.S. government dropped 3.5 million tons of bombs on Vietnam—more than all the bombing in the previous five years.

Then, as now, the official scenario had U.S. troops thinning on the ground, native troops taking up more of the combat burden, and the Pentagon helpfully bombing from the sky as only Americans could "know how." Independent journalist I. F. Stone astutely identified the paradigm in 1970, when the White House struggled with fading public support for the war. The revamped policy, Stone wrote, was "imperialism by proxy," aiming to buy "low-wage soldier-power," an approach that "will be seen in Asia as a rich white man's idea of fighting a war: we handle the elite airpower while coolies do the killing on the ground." Stone would have swiftly recognized the pattern in President Obama's upbeat statement on May 23 that "we will work with the Afghan government to train security forces and sustain a counterterrorism force."

The number of U.S. ground troops in Afghanistan was down by one-third, to 66,000, at the start of this year, when President Obama announced plans to gradually withdraw the remaining troops over a period of two years. High-tech warfare would pick up the slack. The outgoing Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta, told a news conference that a key mission in Afghanistan, persisting after 2014, would be "counterterrorism," a buzzword for heavy reliance on airpower like drones and cruise missiles. Such weapons would give others grief.

A top "national security" adviser to the president, John Brennan, said as much in an April 2012 speech. "As we have seen," he noted, "deploying large armies abroad won't always be our best offense. Countries typically don't want foreign soldiers in their cities and towns." The disadvantages of "large, intrusive military deployments" were many. "In comparison, there is the precision of targeted strikes."

But such "precision" is imperfect enough to be an other's

calamity. Likewise, the extreme relativity of "agony." At his Senate confirmation hearing to become CIA director in February 2013, Brennan spoke of "the agony we go through" in deciding which individuals to target with drones. Perhaps to square some circles of cognitive dissonance, those who inflict major violence often seem moved to underscore their own psychological pain, their own mental wounds. (As if to say, This hurts me as much as it hurts them; maybe even more, given my far more acute moral sensitivities.) When the focus is on the agony of the perpetrators, there may be less room left to consider the grief of their victims.

Shifting the burden of protracted war easily meshes with a zero-sum geopolitical game. Official enthusiasm for air strikes has correlated with assurances that Americans would be facing much less grief than allied others. So, near the end of 2012, the USA Today front page reported that "the number of U.S. deaths in Afghanistan is on track to decline sharply this year, reflecting the drawdown in U.S. forces"—while the death toll for Afghan government forces had climbed to ten times the U.S. level. These developments were recounted as progress all the way around.

As top officials in Washington move to lighten the political load of American grief, their cost-benefit analyses find major strategic value in actions that inflict more grief on others. Political respects must be paid. Elites in the war corps and the press corps do not have infinite tolerance for American deaths, and the Pentagon's latest technology for remote killing is a perpetual favorite. In the long run, however, what goes around tends to come around.

Advice offered by scholar Eqbal Ahmad before 9/11 bears repeating and pondering: "A superpower cannot promote terror in one place and reasonably expect to discourage terrorism in another place. It won't work in this shrunken world." 2

After the "war on terror" gained momentum, Martin Luther King III spoke at a commemoration of his father's birth and said: "When will the war end? We all have to be concerned about terrorism, but you will never end terrorism by terrorizing others." That was more than nine years ago.

Norman Solomon is co-founder of RootsAction.org. His books include War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death and Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State.

Source: <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/05/27-4>

1. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/17/davos-reutersmagazine-dronewar-idAFL1E8CHCXX20120117>

2. <http://www.sangam.org/ANALYSIS/Ahmad.htm>

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2013 Poets' Corner Contest Winners Celebrate

By LYNN M. HANSEN, Chairwoman,
Poets' Corner Committee

The July-August Gathering of Voices features winners of the 32nd annual Poets' Corner Contest, sponsored by the City of Modesto Parks, Recreation and Neighborhoods Department and the Modesto Poets' Corner Committee, a sub-committee of the Modesto Culture Commission.

Judges selected 45 winning poems and 9 Honorable Mentions from 196 entries. Winners ranged in age from Preschool/K to senior citizens, and included three mother/daughter duos: Gillian Wegener and Sophia Orlando, Virginia Dall and Louise Kantro, Nancy Haskett and Sarah Haskett.

This year's special category was entitled "Pets," in celebration of a favorite pet, a family pet, an unusual pet or the pet we wished we had. An unusual twist in the reading occurred when sixth grade student Annyher Reyes-Ayala read her poem Brownie the Guinea Pig while holding Brownie in her arms. The pet behaved perfectly during the performance. In addition to the special category, the contest was open to any other subject and form of poetry.

Congratulations to this year's Poets' Corner poets.

2013 Winners:

Youth:

Annyher Reyes-Ayala, Autumn Collins, Bradley Scott Cinthia A. Hernandez, Czarina Garcia, Dekker White Eleni Keriotis, Eliana Montalavo, Gillian Gray Grace Benham, Jesus Bernal, Josephine Henderson Katie Krieger, Kiley Pesco, Kylie Tuitavuki Lars Paulsen, Mia Bird Hargrave, Paige Johnson Sarah Lim, Sarah O'Leary, Savannah Adeline Lucero Sofia Johnson, Sophia Orlando, Zoe Keriotis

Adults:

Arnold Acker, Casey Giffin, Chyrl Turner Cleo Griffith, Donna Snow, Doug C. Souza Louise Kantro, Lynn M. Hansen, Nancee Kinkaid Maya Nancy Haskett, Roberta Bearden, Sarah Haskett Tom Myers, Tom Portwood, Virginia Calderon Virginia Dall

Honorable Mention Youth:

Bryceen Warda, Eleni Keriotis, Joshua Romano Nick Trovao, Tegan R. Jackson

Honorable Mention Adults:

Donna Snow, Elizabeth Provost, Louise Kantro Virginia Dall



Green Tips for a Green Planet: Green Summer Savings - Energy and \$\$\$

By TINA ARNOPOLE DRISKILL

Air conditioning and landscape watering are major summertime concerns for Stanislaus County residents. In this issue, Green Tips focuses on ways to beat the heat, save some pennies on exorbitant utility and water bills, and promote green summer habits.

Air conditioning can be one of the largest summertime costs in the Central Valley. Most fixes are common sense things you may already know. Just in case you need a reminder:

Consult Modesto Irrigation District or your local energy company for an energy audit. You may qualify for help with weatherizing your home or a rebate for a whole house fan, 14 14½ seer or higher rated central air conditioning unit with or a heat pump in all electric homes.

Avoid heat build-up in the house by opening windows in the cooler evenings and closing windows, drapes and blinds during the heat of the day.

3. Use ceiling fans in rooms where you spend most of your time. Turn them off when out of the room for long periods.

4. Leave the baking, broiling and roasting for cool weather meals. Opt for fresh, raw foods in salads and desserts; and the barbecue is always a winner during the summer heat. Avoid those charcoal and lighter fluid carcinogens, while choosing a natural gas grill or solar powered cooker, if possible, and cooking the food to just done, rather than charcoal blackened.

5. Enjoy lots of cold water and other healthy cold drinks to cool your body temperature down.

6. Upgrading attic and wall insulation is a must for long term cooling and heating efficiency and energy costs.

Water is a major environmental concern all year round especially during summer landscape watering months. Juan Tejada, a City of Modesto water engineer, suggests the following landscape watering options:

Follow the landscape watering schedule in your area. The City of Modesto guidelines call for watering at homes ending even numbered addresses on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays for those homes ending with odd numbered addresses. Note: No watering allowed on Mondays.

Water between the hours of 6 and 8 a.m. and 7 to 8:30 p.m. to avoid burning of plants and grasses and excess water evaporation during hotter hours and infestations of insects and fungi during overnight hours.

Add mulch around plants to keep soil moist, conserve

water and prevent evaporation.

Plant drought tolerant plants. Flax, carpet roses, California poppies, jasmine and rosemary are among those commonly planted in our area and do well.

Routinely check sprinkler and drip system equipment for clogs or leaks to avoid water waste and impair watering efficiency.

ACTION: Consult the following resources for further watering and air conditioning tips and rebate options:

The Waterwise Garden Guide on the City of Modesto Conservation Home Page - www.modestogov.com/pwd/water/conservation

Conservation tips and rebates at www.pge.com or PG&E Smarter Energy at 1-800-933-9555.

Energy Upgrade California at 1-888-404-7336, Op. 1

Weatherization help for low income families at CVOC (Central Valley Opportunity Center) 209-541-0496.



Look for
CONNECTIONS
online at:
<http://stanislausconnections.org/>



ART for KIDS

Linda Knoll, Art Instructor
phone: 209.247.2626
email: llknoll@sbcglobal.net
www.lindaknollart.blogspot.com

A Friend Outside

For Doris

The steel door slams shut behind her
as she marches down the cell block,
a corridor of white, lights glaring.
Here inmates mumble their questions
onto little white papers,
idle hands grip bars,
desperation languishes in the air,
vacant stares do their time.

She is a volunteer from Friends Outside,
a carrier of kites – messages
scribbled with queries –
from those inside,
the living dead,
to families outside
they no longer see.

Into this fortress of cement and steel
she brings her smile, listens to them.
Tell my mom I have learned how to read,
She doesn't write to me anymore.
Are my children ok? They don't come to
see me.
How can I reunite with my daughter?
She hates me.
Each missal of concern
she respectfully gathers
and hand delivers.

Responses vary –
shame simmers,
distrust hangs like dirty laundry,
faces harden –
and often the return message
is simple but direct,
we don't want to talk to you.

— Lynn M. Hansen

Wars of Pen and Ink (Part I)

“Wars of pen and ink often lead to wars of
cannons and bayonets.”
Edward Counsel in Maxims

I had been decided.
The quill had been dangerously dipped
Into the mysterious swirls of salvation and
misery –
The ink, which could spill the blood of
thousands
Or spare the sanity of millions.

The quill scratched the surface of the
parchment
With a reluctant hiss betraying its ill
intention,
Inscribing upon its surface that which
would bring great harm.
Meandering across the page in a drunken
haze,

The quill tip outlined a myriad of symbols.

Attached to the quill was the hand of a
man –
An individual who was often regarded with
great dignity,
For he was a general endowed with the task
of beginning a war.
With flicks of the wrist and waves of the
hand,
The decorated man spelled doom with his
letters.

Upon the page he wrote
Of the atrocities and woe inflicted by the
receiver of the letter –
The purely just and peaceful intent of his
nation
And the wrongs done by the foe.
And it had been decided.

— Bradley Scott, grade 11
Valley Charter High School

Wars of Pen and Ink (Part II)

“Wars of pen and ink often lead to wars of
cannons and bayonets.”
Edward Counsel in Maxims

The war would throw the man's life upon
tumultuous tides,
But he is not who it would affect the most;
The young men in the towns and cities –
The farmers across the plains and over the
hills –
They would be affected most by the
general's words.

Drawn from their houses and their families,
The men will stride with honor in their
breast.
The generals shall post them around the
country,
And march them till their feet are sore,
To a battle from which may shan't return.
All this exploding from the innocent letters
Scattered across the once blank page now
filled with tribulation.
Combined in this manner,
The little words elucidated an affronting
message –
A call for battle.

The parchment was crisply folded and
placed in an envelope
On which steaming wax was heedlessly
poured
To be marked with the authoritative
emblazonment
Denoting the power vested in the
prominent man,
who now sealed this destructive message.

A sharp command escaped the general's
lips,
And a young man appeared in the open
doorway.
Short comments were exchanged
And the man and letter were on their way.
It had been decided.

— Bradley Scott, grade 11
Valley Charter High School

Road Game

Think about this:
on the road driving home
after work, tired and relieved.
The lake by the side of the bank building
with the stone forged waterfall
is always there so you hardly see it
but today you look
and the sunlight sparks off the red hair
of the golden mermaid on the stone ledge.
She is green mixed with blue
her breasts are white with the serenity
of porcelain glistening in heat.
You are stopped for one moment, stilled
before her beauty.
You watch, transfixed, as
she arches gracefully up
and slowly dives down
in an arc of luminescence that transcends
you
Into a softer life.

— Donna Snow

Shots in the Air

A step on the street, a shot in the air
Yes they used to say that this world isn't
fair.
As she sat and she watched from the
window with sorrow
She wondered if things would be different
tomorrow.
She looked and watched the war on the
streets
And continuously saw the look of defeat.

Brothers, sisters, entire generations were
lost
Because no one knew how much this war
would cost.
Doors would be locked and windows shut
tight
Afraid that their children would be lost in
the night.
In the morning she'd walk with a low
hanging head
When she realized that all of the children
were dead.

Fruitful lives lost to neighborhoods and
territories.
Peoples' hearts sank with emptiness when
they heard the stories

Of how lives were lost because of a slash
on some tires
Or because they talked trash and called
each other liars.
Each day survived was a moment to
cherish
'Cause in the blink of an eye everything
could perish.

At nights they light candles to honor the
fallen,
The ones who were caught and forced to
go all in.
Innocent dreams and wonder were replaced
with fear
But they were unaware that the end was so
near.
She looks to the window and hears a shot
in the air,
A constant reminder of why her sons aren't
there.

— Kylie Tuitavuki, grade 11
Valley Charter High School

Smooth Heart

She holds her hands extended
Gnarled and light
As they fit quickly across
The yellowed page
Like a sparrow among thorny branches.

Fingers stained black
From charcoal sticks
Push away moon dipped
Fly-away locks from her
Wrinkled face.

The walls are hung,
Covered with faces on paper
Some imagined, others stolen
From the world
Outside.

A smooth heart beats through
Wrinkled, elegant face
She draws so many people
Everyday
Always.

Why? says her neighbors.
Why? says her friends.
Because people
People matter
She says.

— Sarah O'Leary, grade 10
Whitmore Charter High School



Shared Words, Shared Worlds

By NAOMI SHIHAB NYE, May 03, 2013

After learning my flight was detained 4 hours,
I heard the announcement:
If anyone in the vicinity of gate 4-A understands any Arabic,
Please come to the gate immediately.

Well—one pauses these days. Gate 4-A was my own gate. I went there.
An older woman in full traditional Palestinian dress,
Just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing loudly.
Help, said the flight service person. Talk to her. What is her
Problem? we told her the flight was going to be four hours late and she
Did this.

I put my arm around her and spoke to her haltingly.
Shu dow-a, shu- biduck habibti, stani stani schway, min fadlick,
Sho bit se-wee?

The minute she heard any words she knew—however poorly used—
She stopped crying.

She thought our flight had been canceled entirely.
She needed to be in El Paso for some major medical treatment the

Following day. I said no, no, we're fine, you'll get there, just late.

Who is picking you up? Let's call him and tell him.
We called her son and I spoke with him in English.
I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and
Would ride next to her—Southwest.

She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it.

Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and
Found out of course they had ten shared friends.

Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian
Poets I know and let them chat with her. This all took up about 2 hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling about her life. Answering
Questions.

She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies—little powdered
Sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts—out of her bag—
And was offering them to all the women at the gate.

To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a
Sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the traveler from California,
The lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same
Powdered sugar. And smiling. There are no better cookies.

And then the airline broke out the free beverages from huge coolers—
Non-alcoholic—and the two little girls for our flight, one African
American, one Mexican American—ran around serving us all apple juice
And lemonade and they were covered with powdered sugar too.

Most travel, and certainly
the rewarding kind, involves
depending on the kindness of
strangers, putting yourself into
the hands of people you don't
know and trusting them with
your life.

– Paul Theroux

And I noticed my new best friend—by now we were holding hands—
Had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing,

With green furry leaves. Such an old country traveling tradition. Always
Carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and thought,
This is the world I want to live in. The shared world.

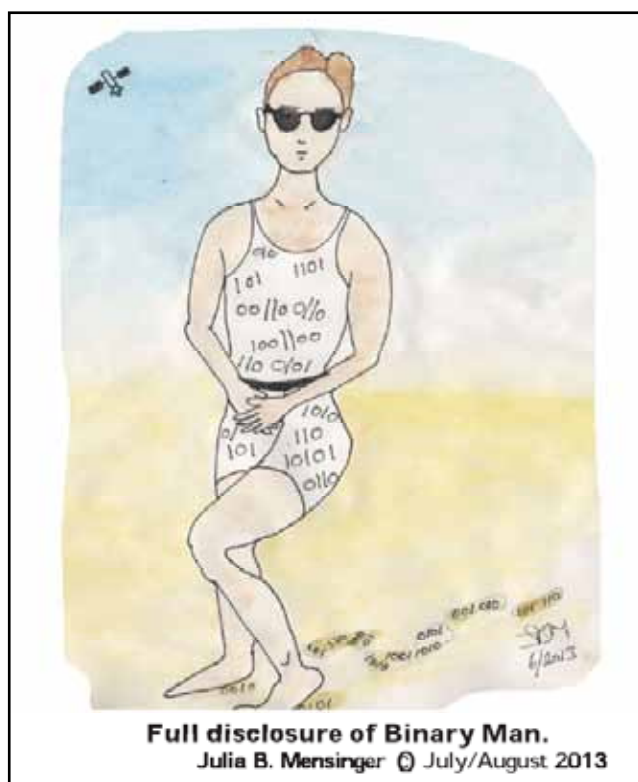
Not a single person in this gate—once the crying of confusion stopped
—has seemed apprehensive about any other person.

They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women too.
This can still happen anywhere.

Not everything is lost.

Naomi Shihab Nye is a poet, songwriter, and novelist.

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LAW OFFICES OF
ROCKWELL, KELLY & DUARTE, LLP

1600 G Street
Suite 203
P.O. Box 0142
Modesto, CA 95353-0142
(209) 521-2552
FAX (209) 526-7898

DAVID N. ROCKWELL
SHARON E. KELLY
JEFFREY DUARTE
MARKUS URSTOEGER
Attorneys/Abogados

B&F

MICHAEL R. BAUDLER, CPA
DONNA E. FLANDERS, CPA

Office (209) 575-2653
Fax (209) 575-0629
e-mail b_f@modestocpas.com

1120 14th Street, Suite 2
Modesto, CA 95350

Modesto Homeopathy
Elise Osner, C Hom
1015 12th St., Suite 4
Modesto, CA 95350

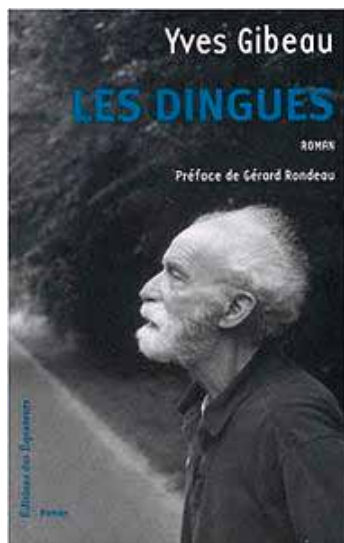
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Life, war, and remembrance on Le Chemin des Dames

By DANIEL NESTLERODE

Another trip to Picardie, France and one of my favorite places in the world, Le Chemin des Dames (more of a road than a place, really) brought to mind the dichotomy between



life and war. Numerous monuments mark the efforts made in two, sometimes three, wars on this small ridge above the Aisne River. Some of them are stark and somber, befitting the destruction of lives. Some of them are sword and banner glorifications of the efforts of one unit or another. Some of them mark a significant spot and explain the event in French, English, and German.

My favorite is the international arboretum on the site of Old Craonne, about

which I wrote last year. When I go there I think about the fact that the men and women who died in the Great War doing what they thought was good and right. In my heart I know these people should not simply be remembered, but celebrated. The question, then, is how do you celebrate the efforts of people who died doing something so terrible?

The answer is to mark the spot, inform the living, and celebrate life. The arboretum does all of these things. So we went back to it, this time to find the grave of celebrated French novelist and pacifist Yves Gibeau.

Driving through Craonelle on our way to Old Craonne we were astonished to discover a massive wooden structure looming 60 meters up on the ridge above us. I was excited

to see something new so near Old Craonne. Surely, the local authorities had added something significant to the historical markers and arboretum. I wanted to know what it was.

As we neared the parking lot at the Old Craonne arboretum, the structure disappeared in the trees. We knew we were close, but could find no indication that anyone had intended the general public to access the structure. Yves Gibeau awaited, so after parking the car, I put the baby in a sling and we walked off in the general direction of his final resting place.

When the sun struck the forest floor after weeks of cool damp weather --not rain, not marine layer moisture, not even fog, but air so heavy with moisture that the overhead sky and the horizon were indistinguishable from each other-- evaporation carried the earthy, spicy scent of new soil. That scent has always sung a single word to me: Life.

My wife, our baby, and I caught the scent on the trail after following a sign marking Yves Gibeau's final resting place. And it made me smile. Searching for a grave, we were walking where life imposed itself upon the terrain.

We rounded a bend in the trail and climbed straight up the hill. Near the crest of the hill we encountered an intact German pillbox. Between 1914 and 1917 it commanded a view of the entire hillside, turning advancement up the slope into a suicide attempt. On the top the French army had added a plaque declaring in French, "To the glory of the 18th Infantry Regiment (Bearn, Pays, Basque, Gascogne), an elite regiment ordered to take the Craonne Plateau, a position judged impregnable, an assault taken with superb élan. Citation by the Army, 4-5 May, 1917." We passed the pillbox and continued up the hill unimpeded.

As we rounded the last bend in the trail the wooden structure we had seen on the valley road loomed over us like some mechanical beast dreamed up by George Lucas. Incredibly, it was an observation platform with three levels. The highest level rose 26 meters above the top of the plateau.

I felt like I had discovered a hidden treasure. Clearly the platform was new. Yet no one had installed signs declaring its existence let alone its location. I left the baby with my wife and nearly ran up the steps of the massive structure. The top platform was even with the treetops immediately north and east of me. But the view south to west was incredible. The Aisne valley lay before me. I could see nearly every house in Craonelle, New Craonne, and Corbeny.

Once again the local authority had found a way to honor the dead, inform the living, and celebrate life. Putting yourself in mind of what this place must have been like 99 years

ago, you understand the tactical advantage the German army had in holding this end of the Chemin des Dames. You can see for miles in three directions; the French would not have been able to assemble an attack force without the Germans knowing about it.

Bring yourself back to the present and you are rewarded with a view of the Aisne River Valley that has been impossible in war or peace for 99 years. In the west Corbeny laid out before me like a map. I could see the farms and houses tucked up beside the forest. Directly south I could see Craonne, rebuilt in its present location in 1921. It looked picture postcard perfect with the church on the left, the Mairie in the middle, and houses all around. And to the southeast, peeking out from a small hillside and a lot of trees was the village of Craonelle, which had been smaller than the original Craonne but was now larger than the new Craonne. In that direction, just up and over one more small ridge lay the way to Paris.

Next time I go, I plan on visiting the offices where the people who maintain the historical sites on Chemin des Dames work. I want to meet them, tell them how much I appreciate what they do, and say, "Thank you."

Evidence does not support fears of Islam in the West

from page 3

background, and are currently estimated to constitute approximately five per cent of the European Union's 425 million inhabitants. As immigrants, generations came with very low labor skills, unlike most Muslims in the United States who generally possess a high level of education and marketable skills.

Low levels of education and few job opportunities explain poor economic performance of Muslims in Europe. Muslim immigrant populations across Europe are often concentrated in segregated, urban areas, which are plagued by delinquency, crime and deteriorated living conditions.

There is a need across the Atlantic to rebuild national narratives to include Muslims and Islam as part of the memory and culture of the national communities they belong to.

This can likely be done if Islam is disconnected from partisan interests and becomes a national cause for political, social and religious actors across the ideological spectrum.

The educational and political efforts of the last five decades to include African Americans into the US national narrative are a good illustration of such a collective effort. In the case of Islam, it will require a coalition among religious actors from all faiths who can play a decisive role in promoting similarities between Islam and other monotheistic religions.

This is a noble political task for the decades to come.

* Dr Jocelyne Cesari is Director of the Islam in the West program at Harvard University and a Senior Research Fellow at the Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Source: Common Ground News Service: www.commongroundnews.org

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