

“New START” ratification likely end of Obama’s “Disarmament Vision”

By GREG MELLO

Albuquerque, NM — What began as a business-as-usual replacement for a Cold War arms treaty, and then became a major legislative challenge for the Obama Administration, was finally ratified by the U.S. Senate today after unusually-involved negotiations with Senate Republicans. New START is a force-affirmation treaty, designed to clarify, but not change or disarm, U.S. and Russian nuclear arms. There is no disarmament required by the treaty. There is no indication that it is a “first step” toward “further” “disarmament.” These negotiations resulted in extensive commitments by the Administration to new spending and upgrades to U.S. strategic armaments, including nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons infrastructure, missile defense research, development, and deployments, and continued development of conventional global strike weapons — much of which is applicable to nuclear delivery systems as well, being currently barred only by (mutable) law.

Ultra-accurate submarine-launched ballistic missile delivery systems have already been developed (but not deployed) under this last program. The full cost of this treaty cannot yet be assessed, as not all the details of understandings reached have been made public, and the full import of some which have depends on future decisions and events. Just this week, and on top of announcements of two major increases in nuclear weapons spending, President Obama promised four senators (including two Democrats) that nuclear weapons complex spending would be exempt from any future fiscal austerity measures that might otherwise apply to appropriations in the Energy and Water subcommittees. The prior increases are posted here and analyzed here and elsewhere at www.lasg.org

The long struggle to ratify the treaty, and its huge final cost in the very coin of arms control which the treaty purports to advance, signals just how weak the Cold War arms control consensus has become. Prospects for

ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), for example, appear nil for the foreseeable future. The U.S. will ratify this treaty, if it does, only when its progressive ratification by other states has reached a point of embarrassment wholly incompatible with U.S. geostrategic ambitions. The way forward for arms controllers is not clear. Russia has made clear on numerous occasions that it has no intention of pursuing further nuclear cuts and has halted the financially-driven erosion of its nuclear forces. With Russia now the world’s largest oil producer and the supplier of a controlling fraction of natural gas to Europe — a fraction that is expected to grow considerably in the coming years — Russia is not the weak negotiating partner that it was during, say, the START II negotiations. The reality of Russian power — and U.S. weakness vis-à-vis military operations in the oil- and gas-rich regions south of Russia — was

START TREATY continued p. 2

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• Committee Reports
• Election of Board Members – Discussion:
• Action plans, ideas and strategies
• Possible By-Law changes
12:30 PM – Adjournment
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INSIDE CONNECTIONS

LOCAL	2
ANIMAL ADVOCACY	3
LIVING LIGHTLY	4
RIVERS OF BIRDS	5

THE REAL VILLIAN	6
RAISE YOUR VOICES	7
GUNS & WARS	8
DIALOGUE	10
MUSIC WITH A BODHRAN	11

Words matter: how media can build civility or destroy it

By SARAH VAN GELDER, BROOKE JARVIS

The media can, as we know, promote fear, hatred, and extremism. Can it also lead us to greater civility and more productive debate?

“Just as media outlets have been used to create a pervasive sense of fear, they have also been used to convince people that conflict is inevitable. This leaves media consumers resigned to the notion that conflict will happen.”

Those words could have been used to describe an increasingly hostile and provocative media in the United States. In fact, they were written to describe the use of the media to incite Hutus to slaughter their Tutsi neighbors in Rwanda, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

The media can choose to provoke the least stable, most trigger-happy sectors of the population. Or it can strengthen democracy,

civility, and the rule of law.

After Jared Loughner opened fire at a political event for Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in Tucson, Arizona, attention quickly focused on the role that divisive and aggressive media may have played in his actions. Pima County Sheriff Clarence Dupnik lamented “the vitriol that comes out of certain mouths about tearing down the government.”

Members of the media were quick to defend themselves. Any discussion of possible political motives, the editors of the National Review wrote, constitute a “vile attempt to tar the opposition with the crimes of a lunatic so as to render illegitimate the views of about half of America.”

The reasons for Loughner’s actions are

WORDS MATTER continued p. 2

START treaty

... from page 1

not lost on Republican ratification opponents.

While on their face most of the Republican objections to ratification appeared foolish and ill-informed, these objections also conveyed a deep unease about the future of American global power, which is hardly misplaced.

The makeup of the incoming House and Senate (112th) is likely to be much more hostile to arms control than the (111th) Congress now concluding.

Looking ahead, prospects for conventional arms control appear worse. There are 23 Democratic Senate seats up for election in 2012, including 2 independents who caucus with the Democrats, compared to only 10 Republican seats. In 2014 Democrats are currently expected to have 20 seats up for election, and Republicans 13, although obviously this could change. For these and other reasons, prospects for conventional arms control measures appear bleak for the foreseeable future. At the same time fresh and far more severe crises are looming, which, in their earliest manifestations, have already begun to capture Congress's (and voters') attention. The implications for the New Mexico laboratories are complex. As noted here, they will suffer from an unprecedented infusion of cash — about six times the total scale of the Manhattan Project in New Mexico, measured in constant dollars. But will this bring better morale, better science, better community relations, a more wholesome community in Los Alamos — or even better stockpile management? That is very far from assured. The reverse, I think, is very likely true. The best days of Los Alamos are in the past, and if the day ever dawns when excavation begins on the giant plutonium complex slated to cost a factor of ten more any federal or state project ever conceived for New Mexico, save the Interstate Highways, it will be a dark day.

As Robert Oppenheimer put it on the 16th of October, 1945, "If atomic bombs are to be added as new weapons to the arsenals of a warring world, or to the arsenals of nations preparing for war, then the time will come when mankind will curse the names of Los Alamos and Hiroshima. The people must unite, or they will perish." Now we know that it may or not be atomic weaponry which kills them, but rather the distraction they have brought, and misprioritization of scarce resources they incur. Today's treaty ratification is not an occasion of joy for the world, but rather a somber warning of the failure of our political system to understand and defend against the true dangers we face.

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Words Matter

... from page 1

still unclear, and evidence suggests that he is mentally ill. We can't know at this point what role media provocation may have played in his decision. Indeed, his actions raise as many questions about our policies on gun ownership and mental illness as they do about our political climate.

At the very least, though, this should be a moment to reflect on the role that media can play in directing the political dialogue in this country. It can, as we know, promote fear, hatred, and extremism. Can it also lead us to greater civility and more productive debate?

Violence and the media

Sadly, the Arizona shooting is only the latest evidence that words do have consequences.

On July 18, Byron Williams was approached by California state police for driving erratically on Interstate 580. A fire-fight ensued—remarkably, all survived—and Williams later admitted he had been on his way to attack the ACLU and the non-profit Tides Foundation. Why Tides? According to Media Matters, Fox News commentator Glenn Beck had verbally attacked the Tides Foundation 29 times in the 18 months before the attempted shooting.

After then-vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin accused presidential candidate Barack Obama of "palling around with terrorists," the Secret Service reported a dramatic increase in threats against Obama.

There are many more stories of threats and vandalism directed at private citizens and public officials, and the links to the violent rhetoric from right-wing media personalities and politicians is chilling. One Texas man, who called the office of Senator Debbie Stabenow and threatened "We'll get you ... like we did RFK; like we did MLK," told FBI officers he was worried the government would take Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh off the air as a result of the "Fairness Doctrine."

Another way

The media can choose to provoke the least stable, most trigger-happy sectors of the population. Or it can choose to strengthen democracy, civility, and the rule of law. When the former Yugoslavia was erupting in ethnic cleansing and massacres, Macedonia's ethnically diverse population remained at peace. South Africa made the transition from Apartheid to majority rule largely without violence. In these and other places, media that highlighted the humanity of all involved played a role, according to the U.S.-based Search for Common Ground.

Instead of simply repeating the anger and allegations of each side—which may have the effect of deepening the conflict or inciting violence—journalists are in a unique position

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to uncover the causes of conflict and discover opportunities for finding common ground. The Conflict Resolution Network advises journalists to:

- Focus on the root causes of problems, not just positions or back-and-forth arguments.
- Ask questions that get people thinking about solutions and common ground: "What would be possible if this problem were fixed?" "What would it take to solve this problem?" "What is it that you do want?" "What would satisfy you?"
- Avoid simplistic divisions between good and bad. Don't encourage or sensationalize personal attacks.
- Report areas of agreement as well as disagreement.
- Think of emotions as symptoms that point to where the real problems are. What clashes of values, needs, or scarce resources are causing an emotional response?

Disagreement over policy is part of a healthy democracy, and conflict is human. But whipping up fear and hatred, demonizing those with conflicting opinions, using violent language, playing on the insecurity and distrust that so easily arise during difficult times—these are irresponsible and wrong. Especially when the media is capable of so much more.

Sarah van Gelder and Brooke Jarvis wrote this article for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit media organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions. Sarah is its executive editor and Brooke is its web editor.

<http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/words-matter-how-media-can-build-civility-or-destroy-it>

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Fighting for Humane-ity in Industry

By SALLY MEARS, Cruelty-Free Consumers

A couple of years ago, a lot of things happened politically that were unprecedented. One of the issues was the passing of the Humane Farming Bill, Proposition 2 in California. This could not have succeeded were it not for some heroes who put their own lives on hold to make sure all the efforts made were not in vain for farm animals throughout California. They helped to educate thousands of people who did not know about some of the horrors and cruelty that are a mainstay in 'modern' factory farming. Here I introduce one of those heroes, born and raised in the Modesto area, who worked tirelessly in our region to help make this proposed change a reality: Michelle Setaro

SM: What was your critical turning point in your life, if you had one in particular?

MS: I lost my brother when he was 36 to a terminal illness that he fought bravely. My family and I watched him suffer and were helpless in finding a cure to rescue him. I have zero tolerance for the causes of suffering we CAN end with thoughtful and kind choices. We should ask ourselves what are the consequences our choices have on other sentient beings.

SM: How did you get involved in Proposition 2 when Humane Society of the U.S. first introduced the campaign?

MS: I received an "action alert" email from HSUS in 2007 which had info. for a ballot measure that could reduce the suffering of millions of animals in California. This is why it is so important for people to go to the websites of animal advocacy orgs (see more information at end).

SM: What most surprised you about what you did/did not know about the Factory Farming industry? What most shocked you?

MS: I wondered how unthinkable acts of animal cruelty could be legal ("standard practice") when committed by industries that exploit animals for profit. You would go to jail if you inflicted these atrocities upon dogs or cats. Also, the killing of animal babies: Pigs and turkeys are slaughtered at 3-6 months; cows for beef: 6 months; chickens: 5 weeks; male calves born into the dairy industry: 4 months; male chicks born into the egg industry: 1 day.

SM: What is difference between traditional family farms and the industrial feed lots?

MS: Over 95% of animal products come from factory farms where animals systematically suffer extreme confinement inside huge warehouses. They will never experience the sun, grass, fresh air. The small family farm is practically extinct, taken over by corporate agribiz. Note: though there may be less suffering on "Humanely Raised" ranches, all animals raised for meat/dairy/eggs end up at the same hideous slaughterhouse to face a painful and terrifying death.

SM: You also are involved in a variety of other related aspects animal advocacy by speaking out on local issues, such as the tragic issue of dog and cat overpopulation. Can you give us some ideas how to help out locally?

MS: First, never buy a companion from a pet store. Adopt 1 or 2 if you can from the shelter to get these animals off death

row. Get involved with Alley Cat Guardians' TNR program to help feral cats. Attend local government meetings and write letters to the editor to speak out on animal issues. Urge local government to ban the sale and breeding of cats and dogs, and to fund "no-cost" spay and neuter until the mass extermination of healthy cats, kittens, dogs, and puppies ends.

SM: What do you feel is some positive movement within the animal advocacy worldwide?

MS: We are beginning to put a spotlight on the plight of animals exploited by industry. We are recognizing and learning about their amazing social, emotional, and intellectual capacities. But we need to abolish the exploitation of animals and recognize that just as we recognize that every human has a fundamental right not to be treated as property of another, we must recognize that every sentient (perceptually aware) nonhuman has that right as well. We have had animal welfare standards and laws for more than 200 years, yet we are exploiting more animals in more horrible ways than at any time in history. Speciesism is wrong the same way racism and sexism are. Learn more about the Abolitionist Approach and specieism at www.AbolitionistApproach.com

SM: You have some very progressive, informative projects going on. Please tell us about three of these tools for local public education, and where we can access them.

MS: I pass out free "Why Vegan" brochures furnished by www.VeganOutreach.org at schools, events, etc. Anyone can go to their website and order brochures for free.

"In Defense of Animals" produces a series of documentaries called *Undercover TV* which is airing across the country and can currently be seen on our local public access station on Comcast Ch. 26, every Thursday at 10 p.m. Most Americans don't know that animals imprisoned on factory farms, fur farms, labs, etc. live in a nightmarish reality hidden from the public and is rarely-if ever- shown on television. *Undercover TV* is the exception, taking viewers behind the scenes of industry.

PETA has launched a Vegan/Vegetarian Starter Kit Program which places both outdoor and indoor newspaper stands around the country to distribute free Veg. Starter Kits. We have a few newsstands in heavy traffic locations in Modesto, but need more. If you are interested in adopting a newsstand, contact ActionTeam@peta.org

SM: So, what is your personal life philosophy and how do you strive to 'practice what you preach'?

MS: Veganism means aligning your actions with the values one claims to hold. It is a commitment to nonviolence and rejects the commodity status of nonhumans with recognition of their inherent value. If you claim to care about animals and the environment, then put those values into action. We can't claim to care about animals yet inflict suffering and death on them because we derive pleasure, amusement, or out of habit or convenience. One cannot be a meat-eating environmentalist either. Animal Ag is an environmental disaster. We seem to suffer from moral schizophrenia.

SM: Tell us how others can help, and how/where to contact you.

MS: Go online to animal advocacy orgs and sign up for "Action Alerts" and order free literature to distribute to others. Sign up with: In Defense of Animals, PETA, Vegan Outreach, Farm Animal Rights Movement, Compassion Over Killing, Mercy for Animals. Educate yourself and others on the plight of farm animals while learning to eat cruelty-free by checking out *The Kind Diet* by Alicia Silverstone at the public library. Other enlightening books available at the library include, *Farm Sanctuary*, *Inner World of Farm Animals*, *Ninety-Five: Meeting Americas Farm Animals* among many others (contact Michelle for further listings) My hope is that one day children will ask their great grandparents, "Where were you during the holocaust of the animals?" Let's all make that day come sooner.

Reach Michelle at: standup4animals@att.net. For other questions or inquiries, or if you'd like to get more involved in local animal advocacy, contact Sally Mears at ryke40@ainet.com, or call 209-402-8923.

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Winter harvest, spring planting

By JENIFER WEST

We took these pictures on New Year's Day – these were the ingredients for our New Year's dinner salad, freshly picked from our backyard. The greens are various types of lettuce, a few dandelions, and a little kale. There is also a beet or two out there, plus a sprinkling of seedling carrots and some onions. There should be more beets, carrots and onions, and even some of the various cabbage family members, but I'm still getting the timing of this year-round gardening business figured out. Still, a respectable harvest for the first of January. And to achieve a winter harvest like this here in the Central Valley, one doesn't need so much as a cold frame (clear glass or plastic cover for a raised bed that lets in sunlight, thereby storing up warmth) – let alone a greenhouse!

And the most amazing thing of all – that little bowl in the center. Believe it or not, those are cherry tomatoes – picked from the last holdout tomato plant in our backyard. They may not be as sweet as they were last summer, but we figure it's doing pretty well, still producing edible fruit as late as the first of the year. And it's still loaded with little green tomatoes. We covered the plant with clear plastic when the cold weather set in. And we're leaving the cover on to see how long the harvest will last. Admittedly, the plant does have an advantage in being snuggled up against a 6-foot high masonry wall, which serves as both a heat sink and a windbreak. But it goes to show that, like a lot of things in life, you can sometimes bend the gardening rules a bit and get some interesting results.

So now it's January, and time to start thinking about spring planting. I find it very uplifting to be thinking about, and working with plants that love the warmer weather while the mercury's still making the short orbit between the 30s and 50s – it's a tangible reminder that the cold, grey days of winter will be over soon.

Tomatoes, peppers and eggplant can be started from seed as early as the end of this month. Potatoes, too, if you're inclined. (Did you know that the potatoes you buy in the store are sprayed to keep them from sprouting?) Potatoes, however, do tend to sprawl – you can grow them in a container, if that makes more sense in your yard. We grew a respectable crop last year in Rubbermaid garbage cans with holes drilled in the bottoms. Planted them in a good layer of compost and a little soil, then covered them with hay every few days, as the shoots came up. Search online for more information on growing potatoes – there are some interesting options. And Anne Schellman, of the University Cooperative Extension, is a wonderful all-around gardening information resource!

In the throes of gardening fever last winter, I built a Grow Shelf, equipped with lights and warming mats, and the tomato seedlings I planted on it just zoomed up! (Didn't end up saving much, by the way, over buying a slick, shiny, well-engineered Grow Shelf I spotted in a catalogue – but I learned a lot in the process, so the project was still worth the effort.) But a Grow Shelf really isn't a critical piece of equipment – a warm, sunny window will do, until the seedlings are ready to transplant outdoors.

A spring crop of lettuce, spinach, cabbage, carrots, beets, onions, shallots, chard, radishes and other cool weather veggies can also be started now, and at intervals over the



next little while. Peas, too, can be planted anytime in the next month or so (through late February). They're one of those wonder plants – the shoots, long familiar to Asian food enthusiasts, taste remarkably "pea-like" and can be eaten as soon as they are a few inches tall. And the peas themselves, if you can wait that long, can be eaten at almost any stage. The leaves, and even, in some cases the flowers, of some of the other food plants are edible, too – broccoli comes immediately to mind. However, while the lovely green, ferny tops of carrots are tempting, they contain a toxin and should only be eaten in very small quantities, and only occasionally. And the foliage of nightshade plants (tomatoes, eggplants, peppers), as well as some of the other food crops, is NOT edible. If you are interested in sampling any part of a food plant that hasn't traditionally been consumed, please do some careful research first.

The same principle applies to weeds. Dandelion is edible, and I've read that it doesn't have any poisonous look-alikes, but I'm still pretty careful when foraging for it in my backyard. (And I try to stay away from the areas the dogs frequent!) Some other weeds are also edible, but you want to make absolutely certain you've correctly identified any plant you're considering ingesting – the consequences of sampling even so much as a tiny bit of some weeds can be dire.

So get out those seed catalogues, or go online. Johnny's Selected Seeds (www.johnnyseeds.com/) and Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply (www.groworganic.com/) are two companies I've been very happy working with, and I'm sure there are others, as well.

Happy Spring, and happy gardening!

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Sierra Club and Audubon Society offer scholarships

By ELAINE GORMAN

The local Yokuts group of the Sierra Club and Stanislaus Audubon Society are offering two \$500.00 scholarships for fall 2011. High school seniors and continuing college students may apply. The Donna Durham Memorial Scholarship and the Bob Corey/Paul Illick Memorial Scholarship will honor former members of the Sierra Club and Audubon Society.

These scholarships are offered to students who are currently working on a conservation or environmental project/activity, or have worked on one in the past, and are also residents of Stanislaus County or attend school in Stanislaus County.

Besides submitting an application, qualified students must submit a short essay. Postmarked deadline for submissions is March 31, 2011.

Information is available through high school counseling offices, Modesto Junior College, UC Merced, or CSU Stanislaus. Applications are available at <http://motherlode.sierraclub.org/yokuts>. For more info., contact Yokuts member Elaine Gorman, goford@sbcglobal.net



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Rivers of Birds, Forests of Tules: Central Valley Nature & Culture in Season

By LILLIAN VALLEE

71. The Subtle World

Cold, short and milky winter days in the Central Valley create the perfect conditions for curling up with a stack of books, and there is one book especially worth reading before the days lengthen again and draw us outdoors. The book I have in mind is a magnificent fusion of scholarship, fieldwork and imagination by Laura Cunningham entitled *State of Change: Forgotten Landscapes of California*. Calmly and painstakingly the author-artist tells the story of California as she has pieced it together from observation and study and expressed it in her line drawings, acrylic and oil paintings, and native grass/ wildflower notes and charts. It is a quiet, deliberate and loving voice that tells this story, and the telling is full of small delights and surprises, such as the Spanish name for a willow thicket at the edge of a salt marsh, a sausal (the origin of Sausalito?) or the phrase, tidal prism, to denote the area covered by the tides sweeping in and out of an estuary.

Early in the book, Cunningham describes her admiration for an exhibit at Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science. In 2004 Elise Brewster, Robin Grossinger, and Susan Schwartzenberg of the San Francisco Estuary Institute had assembled maps, photographs and text to recreate a view of the Bay Area before European settlement. They had put up signs with the questions: "How do we gain the ability to see the subtle world?" "How do we recognize the seemingly static places we inhabit as the dynamic products of nature and history — when the clues are hidden and most of us moved here in recent decade?" The exhibit had invited Cunningham to look "deeper into time." "As I had discovered trying to imagine grizzly bears in El Cerrito Plaza's past," she writes, "detecting the underlying legacy of the land is not an easy task."

In addition to being a book beautiful to graze in, *State of Change* provides the reader with a wealth of information for further study of various California habitats. One of the best sources, for example, for learning "about the state of the art of historical ecology," according to Cunningham, is the website of the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) which has used a variety of natural and documentary archival sources to reconstruct landscapes. The information the Institute has gathered ranges from pollen in sediments to packrat midden fossils, as well as missionary texts and toponymy (place names). See <http://www.sfei.org/>

Here is an example of the result in Cunningham's book: "During the Ice Age the bay did not exist. So much of the world's water was tied up in the huge continental glaciers that sea levels were lower, and the coast at this time was well outside the Golden Gate.... The bay was a wide valley with ancient bison, horses, and Columbian mammoths roaming over its grasslands and oak-conifer forests. The Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers met and combined into a single large

river, which flowed through what we now know as Carquinez Strait, then between today's Angel Island and Tiburon, and out to the sea."

Central Valley readers may be most interested in the chapters entitled "The Inland Marshes," "River World," "California Grasslands," "The Oak," and "First Fish." The first illustrates how efforts at restoring populations of toads and fish in freshwater marshes led agencies and volunteers to practices similar to those once used by California Indians:

burning, digging, pruning to prevent ponds from being choked off by vegetation.

In "River World" Cunningham looks for yellow-legged frogs and then, after finding none in "perfect frog habitat," explains: "Growing evidence indicates that pesticides and herbicides applied to agricultural area, such as the Central Valley, are borne on winds and deposited in snow and stream waters hundreds of miles distant. Organophosphate pesticide residues can be found in air, water, snow, and even pine needle samples at Sequoia National Park and Lake Tahoe.... Fifty percent of frogs and tadpoles at Yosemite had measurable levels of pesticides in their bodies and lowered cholinesterase activity, which

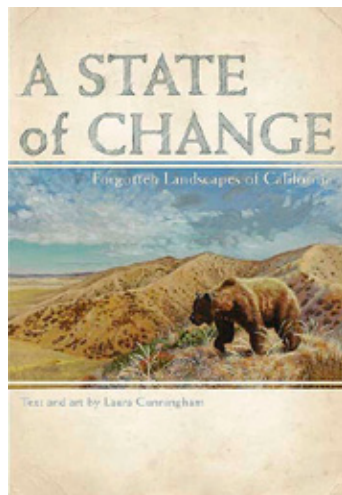
is potentially fatal." While she admits that more research is needed in this area, she also suggests that frogs may be the canaries in the coal mine, "alerting us to hidden toxic effects of agrochemicals deposited by the rains and flowing down meltwaters into every river, creek, and pool downwind."

California bunchgrasses receive affectionate and erudite treatment, and some of my favorite line drawings are here: of grass leaves and seed heads, of a chart with wildflower bloom times and a small drawing, in the margin, of a ground squirrel eating the seed head of meadow barley. Here, too, are oil paintings of vernal pools with black-necked stilts wading in them in winter and pronghorn grazing in them in summer. "A surprisingly wide array of invertebrates and vertebrates make the seasonal pools their home," writes Cunningham. "I have good memories of a chorus of continuously trilling spadefoot

toads breeding in rain pools one night on the eastern floor of the San Joaquin Valley, on still out-of-the-way ranchland. The night rain soaked us but brought the buried toads out from their sealed mud cocoons in the seemingly barren grasslands."

A State of Change has the intimate texture of an illuminated journal and a comforting, familial voice, reassuring even as it addresses our collective ecological shortcomings. Cunningham has answered the question posed at the beginning of the book: we gain the ability to see the subtle world when we care enough to look at it in all of its glorious detail, none of it irrelevant; when we learn from those who have devoted their lives to divining its mysteries; when we are thoughtful in imagining the past and bold in imagining a more inclusive future; and when we share what we have learned with passion, grace and humility. *A State of Change* is a love letter to California at a time when our state desperately needs one.

Sources: Laura Cunningham, *State of Change: Forgotten Landscapes of California* (Heyday Books). Visit Laura Cunningham's website at <http://www.a-state-of-change.com/>. Heyday Books, <http://www.heydaybooks.com/>



A Buddhist perspective on access to guns

By JAMES BARAZ

How can we make sense out of the senseless? When a deranged young man opens fire killing innocent people, what lessons can we take away that can give meaning to the lost lives? Learning something new or deepening our understanding seems to be the best way to honor those who've suffered the most. I'd like to offer some thoughts from a Buddhist perspective.

Events unfold largely due to causes and conditions. An event like this does not happen in a vacuum. An unbalanced person with paranoid delusions, with easy access to guns, immersed in a culture of hatred and violence, whipped up by a media hungry for sensational news, given messages that a politician is threatening his well-being and should be targeted, can produce the tragedy we're dealing with now. All of those factors were likely at play. To only blame the young man's mental stability and simply say, "Oh, he was nuts," misses the point. Our country spends 60 percent of its budget on the military and more than the next dozen nations combined. Is it just a coincidence that we have so many civilian gun killings? Pima County sheriff Clarence Dupnik sarcastically commenting on the easy access to guns said, "What will be next — Uzis in kids' cribs?" Yet, we were still shocked.

Every human being wants to feel safe and have peace. That's a tall order in a culture that glorifies violence. Gun rights groups are now proposing legislation that would require the Arizona Department of Public Safety to provide firearms training to state legislators. Would that have protected Gabrielle Giffords? As Martin Luther King pointed out:

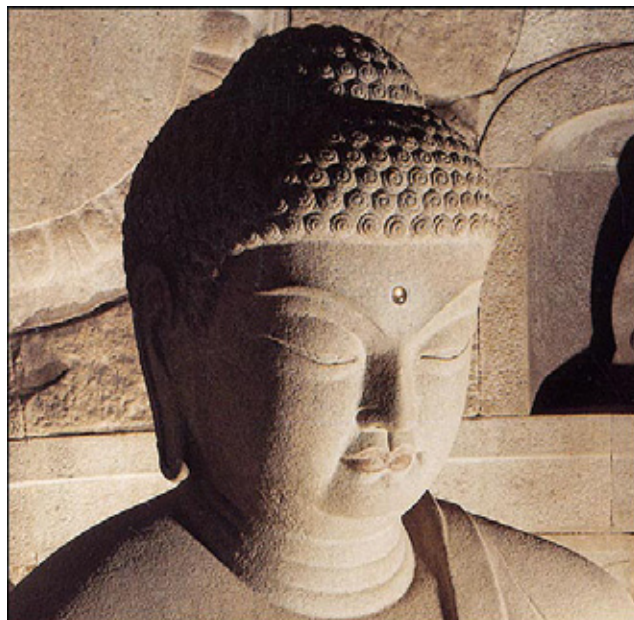
"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate... Returning violence for violence multiples violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that."

The Buddha similarly taught, "Hatred never ceases by hatred. Hatred only ceases by love. This is an ancient and eternal law."

When the news about the shootings first came out, many assumed that right wing conspirators were behind it. That conclusion led to outrage. Later, when it became obvious that the killer was mentally unstable, the outrage lessened a bit, at least toward the suspect, because he was clearly confused. Even though what he was doing made sense to him, he was ignorant of his actions on some level because he was out of touch with reality.

In Buddhism, ignorance has an even broader definition. One aspect of it is not truly understanding the karmic consequences of our actions. Another is lack of awareness as to where happiness really lies. Basic understanding of karma states very simply that actions which come from greed, hatred or ignorance lead to suffering. Actions based in generosity, kindness and wisdom lead to happiness. After his enlightenment, the Buddha was motivated to teach because of the ignorance he saw: although everyone wants to be happy, most people are acting in ways that lead to more suffering.

Jesus' famous statement on the cross was based on this



same understanding: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He saw that, although on one level they knew very well what they were doing, they didn't understand who he was or the consequences of their actions because their minds were colored by hate and fear.

The real villain in this story is not Jared Loughner. It's not the media. And it's not the gun rights advocates. The real villain is ignorance. Because of ignorance, people project their fear and turn those who are different into enemies — both in their minds and in actuality. This is the history of war, as Sam Keen brilliantly pointed out in *Faces of the Enemy*. Once you demonize the "other" they become less than human and you can inflict pain on them without guilt or shame.

Clamoring for more access to guns because you genuinely want to feel safer is like trying to put out a fire with gasoline. And those politicians who seem to know what they're doing as they spew vitriol, consciously inciting and provoking others by making an opponent a target, are simply pyromaniacs enthralled by the fire of conflict and power. That, too, is ignorance in the Buddhist sense because, although it might seem to have a purpose, in the end it will not lead to less suffering.

Right now, this tragedy is capturing our attention. Can anything good come from it? Unfortunately, Columbine and the shooting spree at Virginia Tech had little effect on the access to guns by anyone including the mentally unstable. The NRA is stronger than ever. And the cowboy mindset in this country, from our military budget to Second Amendment advocates, is still entrenched in our psyche. The response of two congressmen to the Arizona tragedy was to announce that they would be carrying guns from now on. Not exactly good modeling for non-violence. As long as media is salivating over stories that frighten and outrage us, it's unlikely that the level of public discourse will favor voices that speak to our nobler qualities. As one friend puts it, "At this point in time we are in a race between fear and consciousness."

A story like this affects us all. But rather than hoping it's a wakeup call that magically turns down the hateful rhetoric and makes our society safer, I believe what's needed is a personal inquiry. Do you get outraged and wish ill will on those who

have a different political viewpoint than yours? Do you feel uplifted when they're the target of ridicule?

A friend who shared his reflections about the shootings said it made him ask himself, "How do I show up in this culture?" We need to stop and feel into it — the pain, the fear, the anger, the confusion — and ask ourselves: "Where does this take me? What's the wisest response internally and externally?" The answers from the past aren't quite sufficient. Something else is needed. This is the time to ask ourselves how spirituality can help when a new response is called for.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote,

"If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

Each of us has love and hatred within us. The more we can be aware of how our own anger and ill will colors our thoughts, words and actions, the greater the chance for real transformation within ourselves. That transformation can lead to genuinely understanding how the confusion of an individual or a group could create greater pain and sorrow for themselves and others. When we can see the real villain as ignorance, we can stop demonizing "the other side." Then our words and actions, based in clarity and compassion, minus the hate, will be more effective and be part of a larger transformation in human consciousness.

James Baraz is a co-founder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and has taught the online "Awakening Joy" course since 2003. To learn more about the upcoming 2011 course, visit <http://www.awakeningjoy.info/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-baraz/making-sense-out-of-the-s_b_808309.html?view=screen

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A letter from Ron Kovic to young veterans and GIs: raise your voices, protest, stop these wars

The following is a personal appeal from Ron Kovic, Vietnam War veteran and author of *Born on the Fourth of July*, to Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans and active-duty service members. Kovic issued the appeal to bring more veterans and GIs into the anti-war struggle and to support the work of March Forward!

As a former United States Marine Corps infantry sergeant, who was shot and paralyzed from the mid-chest down on Jan. 20, 1968, during my second tour of duty in Vietnam, and someone who has lived with the wounds of that war for over 40 years, I am writing this letter to ask you to join me as we begin a critical new phase in the growing anti-war movement.

Many of you have already served multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. You have been coming home now for almost 10 years. Many have begun to question, to doubt these wars and our leaders. Over two million of you have served honorably in both theatres of conflict. Though many years separate us, we are brothers and sisters.

Though we have fought in conflicts generations apart, we have all been to the same place. We know what war is. We understand it, and for many of us, our lives will never be the same again. In many ways, we represent a very powerful force in our country, a moral, spiritual, and political high ground that is unassailable, a potential to transform our nation that is undeniable. No one knows peace or the preciousness of life better than the soldiers who have fought in war, or been affected by it directly: the mother of a son who has died, a wife who will never see her husband again, a child who will never have a father, a father who will never see his son again.

For, it is we who live with the physical and emotional scars of war, and we who live with these wounds everyday, and feel their weight and pain every morning. It is we who have walked and wheeled through the streets of our country and watched children stare at us and wonder why. And it is we who cry out now for the future, for a world without war.

We are the reminders of what war can do, of how it can wound and hurt, and diminish all that is good and human. We struggle everyday to believe in a life that was almost taken away from us. We know that even though we have lost, though parts of our bodies may be missing, though we may not be able to see or feel, we are important men and women, with important lessons to teach, with important things to share.

Those of us lucky enough to have survived combat yearn for life now, for beauty, for all that is decent and good, for in war we saw the worst in the human being. We saw poverty

and death, killing and savagery, the darkest sides of the human soul, the most hated parts of our humanity.

I, like many Americans who served in Vietnam and those now serving in Iraq and Afghanistan (and countless human beings throughout history), had been willing to give my life for my country with little knowledge or awareness of what that really meant.

Like many of you who joined up after 9/11, I trusted and believed and had no reason to doubt the sincerity and motives of my government. It would not be until many

Those of us lucky enough to have survived combat yearn for life now, for beauty, for all that is decent and good, for in war we saw the worst in the human being. We saw poverty and death, killing and savagery, the darkest sides of the human soul, the most hated parts of our humanity.

months after being wounded, and while recovering at a Veterans hospital in New York that I would begin to question whether I, and the others who had gone to that war had gone for nothing.

Change does not come easily, and opposing ones government during a time of war is often very difficult. You've been taught to follow orders, to obey and not question, to go along with the program and do exactly what you're told. You learned that in boot camp. You learned that the day the drill instructors started screaming at you. It is "Yes Sir and No Sir and nothing in between. There is the physical and verbal abuse, the vicious threats and constant harassment to keep you off balance. It is a powerful conditioning process, a process that began long ago, long before we signed those papers at the recruit stations of our hometowns, a process deeply ingrained in the American culture and psyche, and it has shaped and influenced us from our earliest childhood.

The late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that, "A time comes when silence is betrayal." King went on to say that, "The truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty. Even when pressed with the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within ones own bosom and the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexing as they often do in the case of this dreadful conflict we are often on the verge of being mesmerized but we must move on."

Over 40 years have passed since Dr. King spoke those words to an overflow crowd at the Riverside church in New York City in 1967, and the tragic lessons of Vietnam continue to go unheeded. The same patterns of wars, lies, aggression and brutality continue to repeat themselves. Another country, another occupation, another reason to hate

and fear, but in the end it is the same crime being committed over and over again, the same innocent civilians being killed, the same young men and women returning home in caskets and body bags and wheelchairs.

We have petitioned our government time and time again. We have peacefully marched and demonstrated for over a decade yet the killing and mayhem continues. Precious lives continue to be wasted as another generation of young men and women are squandered in this, our latest foreign policy debacle.

Our leaders refuse to listen. They refuse to learn. How many more senseless wars, flag-draped caskets, grieving mothers, paraplegics, amputees, stressed-out sons and daughters, innocent civilians slaughtered before we finally decide to break the silence of this shameful night? Many of us trusted and believed that change would come, these wars would end, and that we would finally be listened to but that is not at all what has happened. We have been tragically misled.

We have been deceived and betrayed. We have been promised peace and we have been given war. We have been told there would be change and nothing is changing. Rather than learning the lessons from the disastrous fiasco in Iraq, our government continues down the path of destruction, brutality, aggression and war, dragging us deeper into another senseless and unnecessary conflict in Afghanistan. The physical and psychological battles from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan will rage on for decades, deeply impacting the lives of citizens in all countries involved.

As the 43rd anniversary of my wounding in Vietnam approaches, in many ways I feel my injury in that war has been a blessing in disguise. I have been given the opportunity to move through that dark night of the soul to a new shore, to gain an understanding, a knowledge, a completely different vision. I now believe that I have suffered for a reason, and in many ways I have found that reason in my commitment to peace and non-violence. We who have witnessed the obscenity of war and experienced its horror and terrible consequences have an obligation to rise above our pain and sorrow and turn the tragedy of our lives into a triumph.

I have come to believe that there is nothing in the lives of human beings more terrifying than war, and nothing more

LETTER. continued p. 8



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

Letter

... from page 7

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important then for those of us who have experienced it to share its awful truth.

A time comes when a people can no longer wait. A time comes when the agonies, the suffering, have become too great. A time comes when a people must act and do what is necessary. Lives are at stake. No longer can we trust the President or politicians to end these wars. No longer can we believe them when they say the troops will come home soon. They have long since lost their credibility.

Each day that passes another life is lost. Each hour that this war drags on the need for a daring new approach by the anti war movement becomes more apparent. Bold, creative, and imaginative leadership is needed, and I do not believe there is a group more suited for that task at this time than the veterans of our nations most recent conflict.

[Reference to a past event deleted]

May this action and other actions like it in the days ahead represent a growing awareness by the American people that only they can end these wars and begin to redirect the priorities of our nation toward more positive and life-affirming goals.

I am writing this letter to you today asking you to join them on that day and the difficult days ahead, to bravely, and with great dignity step over that line you've not stepped over before and begin to exert that powerful moral force you as veterans and active-duty troops represent; to raise your voices, to protest, to demonstrate, to end these wars and make our country a better place.

This is my hope. This is my prayer.

With great admiration and respect,

Ron Kovic

Vietnam veteran

Author, Born on the Fourth of July

<http://www.marchforward.org/>

Education and Strategy Conference
on US Militarism, Washington, DC –
April 8-10, 2011

Invitation to Endorse and Plan

Sponsored by: Latin America Solidarity Coalition in
Conjunction with School of the Americas Watch Days
of Action, April 4-11, 2011

Many movements and organizations have concluded that the United States is at a crossroads. Down one road lies permanent war, a stagnant economy and loss of liberty. Down the other lies a new world of cooperation, prosperity and freedom. The Latin America Solidarity Coalition and School of the Americas Watch share with the vast majority of Latin Americans and people of the world the desire to travel on the road to a new and better world.

We invite your organization to partner with us to plan a conference to bring together Latin America solidarity activists, people of faith, academics, youth and students, anti-war activists, labor, women, and all sectors which are working to build a better world. A major obstacle to that better world is the militarization of US relations with the world and the bankrupting of our economy under the weight of a nearly \$1 trillion budget for war and preparation for war.

Topics covered by this conference will include: US military bases, military spending, immigration and border militarization, coups, war profiteers, privatization of war, closing the School of the Americas, foreign military and police aid, growing our skills in media, research, and other organizing, counter recruitment and support for active duty resisters, and much more.

Endorsing organizations are expected to promote the conference to their base and participate in one or more committees (Outreach, Program, Logistics, and Action) and/or a Sector Working Group.

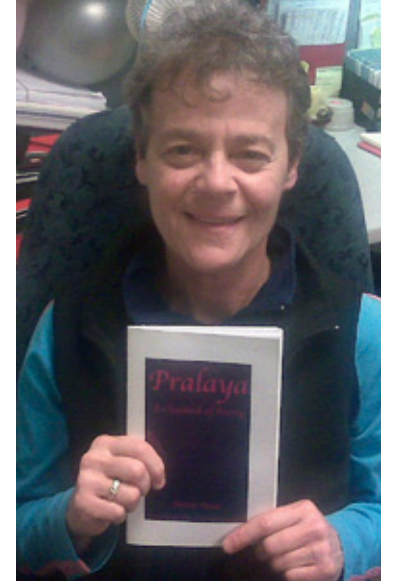
To add your organization to the endorsers of the conference, to learn more, email AFGJ@AFGJ.org. Endorsing organizations submit workshop proposals to stansfieldsmith@yahoo.com.

LASC: www.lasolidarity.org/; SOA Watch: www.soaw.org/take-action/lobby-days

Poet: Doreen Domb

Doreen Domb's first published poem appeared in a city-wide anthology for the Buffalo, NY public schools; she was in the fourth grade. She has contributed articles, poems, book & event reviews to various publications for over 30 years.

Public readings have encompassed being a featured poet for the Nevada County Poetry Series (Grass Valley Center for the Arts), reading live on FM radio (KVMR-Nevada City; KUSF-Univ. San Francisco), performing at Luna's Cafe-Sacramento, and participating in annual events to celebrate National Poetry Month each April.



Fall 1995 saw the manifestation of her first poetry chapbook, *Pralaya*. An anthology presenting diverse work of the Grass Valley Cafe Writers is due to be published in January 2011, and will include a portion devoted to Doreen's poetry. Additionally, Doreen provides editorial assistance to individuals, businesses & nonprofits through her Superlative Editorial Services enterprise [<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/doreen-domb/9/202/b4a>]. Her other life passion is expressed through her holistic healing practice as a REIKI Master practitioner.

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HONORING MEMORY

{for my cat, Dracula}

Some seven days previous
your morning dialog resurfaced
reprieve unimagined after so many months
my silent rejoicing rebounding
as we conversed before your morning meal
your appetite delightfully ravenous

it was the calm before a final storm

A vigil balances upon heavy remembrance
of a shared life energy...
steadying your furry softness
while the violent retching shook your core
listening carefully to rhythmic purring
that sometimes settled
as your heart quickened
your ears grew so hot
and the tail-end ache
for a long distance freedom
was beginning with glorious release

Now waves of sweeping emptiness
solidify to become tangent feeling
that touches and is touched
rising slowly from that glowing white place
a love whose center is everywhere
and boundaries nowhere

Day following I heard a single mourning
dove's strain of sad peace
on the third day
your spirit's resting journey was begun

WHY NOT

Nervous about everything two months after
I've quit smoking
major changes are begun from infancy
why is it so easy before it gets hard
harder
why a shorter short cut
before the longer long haul

why does the oil light continue to wink at me
when the operation was a success

Poetic gills close for weeks
sleep restless in still moments
everytime I'm there to hear
church bells clang ominous warning across the street

Who what
first birthed fear
teaching it as reality,
foundation that feels rootless
yet we all share an unforgotten taste

PUTTING OUT THE CALL

{the first day U.S. troops were deployed to Iraq}

At mid-afternoon beneath a hazy full moon
I walk out to pier's edge resting above
the small pond contained by Coyote Woods —
seconds above my despair
and the heaviest of heart
mind's eye lifts up -- puts out the call
to hidden protectors of divine common sense,
speaking wishes for non-emanating energy source
of personal fanaticism, violent discontent

Sending voice above my head
I beseech celestial devas to quietly capture --
then sing, steer and shelter a calming
wisdom song of divine common sense,
carrying it to countless characters that make a country
a planet - a universe

Watermark of ancient longing
I am holding still
suspended in watery composure,
listening
waiting
listening...

- Doreen Domb, March 2003

SCHOOL IS NOT OPEN

Awaiting our first lesson from space
you were blown out of the sky
all seven of you

I am not convinced of death
feeling you have catapulted through
another world intact
or become divine tears in the universal
mix with mine and others

In dreams I hear...
shard of tethered flesh to bone and fabric
washed up amid a sea of broken panels
battered boosters

Nothing is worth not getting
close to strangers until departure

DEER TRAIN ON 49

Doing 63mph on 49hwy
suddenly appears
barreling locomotive blur of fur
flesh and bone plowing the night asphalt
antlered crown down and in charge position
riding warp speed body
scant inches from engine nose
spotting him beyond last possible second
so clear too late
yet moment later
both of us here to breathe the tale
while others nowhere near such luck
the times deer, human and machine
have collided at unintentioned crossroads

LIKE NOW

Sometimes patches of clarity...
sneaking back
I feel like the woman
who finally got to look
through the big telescope at Saturn
only to find a fluorescent-white planetary cut-out
pasted against the murky night sky
I was crushed!
no 3-D
like now

CALIFORNIA FIRE IN THE SKY

Sunrise and sunset are one this day --
fiery burnished orb sits sizzling
in sky burning with indifference
futile boundless pointless
to wonder which end is up



Teen Creative Studio Modesto Sound hosts Open House at new location: Gregori High

Brenda Francis had a vision to empower youth to be successful in their music recording endeavors when she decided to open her non-profit teen recording studio, Modesto Sound, under the umbrella of the Stanislaus Arts Council, in her home five years ago. Since then, this vision has expanded to provide even more creative opportunities for teens ranging from live sound to radio production. She has ten dedicated staff members (some paid and some volunteer). To date, she has recorded over 400 artists and bands from Modesto and surrounding cities. Modesto Sound has also given over 25 free concerts to the community, issued many radio and TV shows that feature local artists, and coordinated an annual youth internship program with a total of 50 participants to date.

Many of the bands that have recorded at Modesto Sound have been composed of students from area high schools such as Downey High School, Riverbank High School and Pitman High School. Indeed, it is often high school students that are in most need of high quality recording at affordable prices.

Modesto Sound is now moving onto the newly opened Gregori High School where it will provide music recording, internships, and other creative vocational training and ser-

vices to teens. The studio is open to students during school hours and, to the community after school hours.

Gregori High School's academic structure is based on students choosing one of four Smaller Learning Communities (SLCs). Modesto Sound can offer real world experience for the Digital Media and Business Academy SLC and the School of Visual & Performing Arts SLC.

Modesto Sound is located in the Career Center next to the library and operates as a non-profit under the umbrella of the Stanislaus Arts Council, which has been providing supplemental art programs to Stanislaus County's public schools since 1984 through their Stanislaus Artists as Resources to Schools (STARS) program.

Modesto Sound will host an open house on Friday, March 4th from 5 to 7 p.m. Local youth will play music, give tours and serve refreshments. Support their efforts by attending. Gregori High School is located just north of Kaiser Hospital between Stoddard and Dale Rd., north of Kiernan Ave. at 3701 Pirrone Rd., Modesto. For information, call 209-573-0533 or visit <http://www.modestosound.com/>, or email modestosound@gmail.com

2-Roads Productions: a tribute to local art and science

Dr. Richard Anderson and Ed Bearden have formed 2-Roads Productions, showcasing Stanislaus County poetry and science programs on Comcast Ch. 26 and AT&T U-Verse. 2-Roads is a half-hour show, with Richard producing the Science episodes and Ed the poetry and arts programming. Episodes began in January; each being broadcast twice, Monday at 11:30 a.m. and Saturday at 5:00 p.m.

Programs will air each week of 2011 and include many great interviews with poets who read their poems, share their views, discuss their favorite poets or describe their books. Many of our poets are also talented musicians and artists, so those aspects of their creative lives are also explored. Ed is the current Modesto Poet Laureate and is passionate about displaying and fostering the considerable poetry talent that thrives in Modesto.

Richard is Biology Professor Emeritus at Modesto Junior College. His programming, starting later in 2011, will focus on science that is used every day in our community's farming, water supply, recycling, waste disposal, and other life supports for Modesto. Some programs will be selected from the weekly Science Colloquium series at MJC. His segments will also include documentaries on local natural environments and their roles in sustaining Modesto's quality of life.

February schedule for 2-Roads:

Feb. 7, 12: Meter Maids: This appropriately named poetry group has been writing for more than 10 years and recently shared their poetry at the Barking Dog Restaurant in Modesto.

Feb. 14, 19: Lynn M. Hansen: Lynn is a biologist turned prize-winning poet. Don't miss this one.

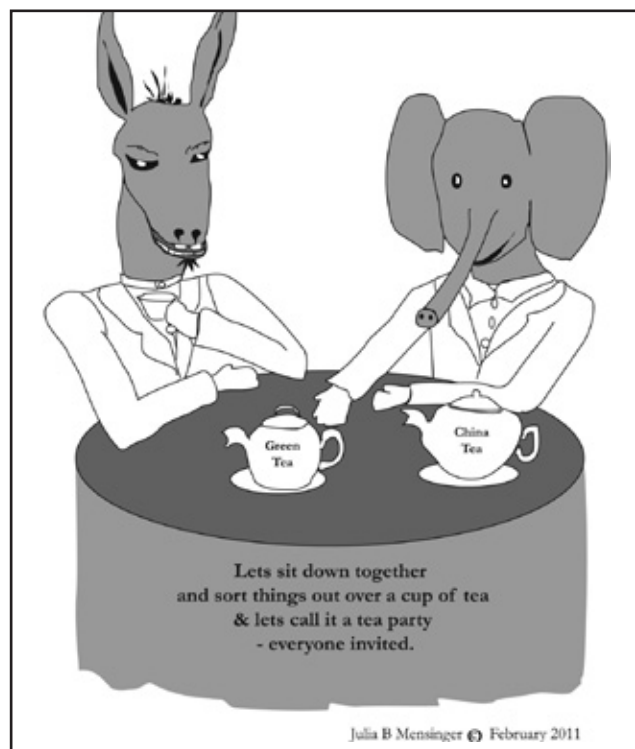
Feb. 21, 26: Collision III, a collaboration of poetry and photography, Part 1

Feb. 28, March 5: Collision III, a collaboration of poetry and photography, Part 2

ACTION: Tune in to Channel 26, 11:30 a.m. Mondays,

and 5:00 p.m. Saturdays. To access the show through ATT U-Verse, go to <http://mytv26.org/> Click on Save Public Access and it will take you to a place that describes how to link to 2-Roads or any other program on MyTV26 or any other program on the public access channel.

If you are a poet who would like to be interviewed for the series, e-mail Ed, choc624@sbcglobal.net. If you would like to work with Richard in developing a science episode, contact him, andersonr@mjc.edu. If you could help with a 2-Roads Face Book page, contact Richard or Ed.



Jake Kiriara

Thank you for a truly wonderful tribute to my Jake. He really was all about the "journey." I was so lucky to share the last lap with him/them. [See p. 7, January Connections]

I always knew my husband, Jake and Fran's son, was a great guy. After caring for his parents these last 14 years, I came to understand why.

Really appreciate the work you do. Bless you.

Kay Kiriara
Livingston, CA

MJC's Civic Engagement Film series

All films screened in Forum 110 at 7 p.m. on a Thursday night.

February 10 — The Devil Came on Horseback featuring Brian Steidle, former U.S. Marine Captain, documents the sustained attacks by the Sudanese government against its own citizens in the Darfur region. The movie presents photos and an interview of Steidle who ultimately despairs that the international community stands off as so many die and suffer. He returns to the U.S. ultimately to expose the story with the help of New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof.

February 24 — Facing Death. This Frontline documentary examines the poignant end-of-life processes of three people and the struggles they and their families experience. After the film, discuss this complex issue with a panel of three local medical experts: Roland Nyegaard, MD. (General Practice), Debbie Pereira, RN., Bernard Mora, MD. (Child Psychiatrist).

March 10 — The One Percent. In America, one percent of the population controls half the country's wealth. What impact does this financial disparity have on politics in our society? Filmmaker Jamie Johnson, 27 year-old heir to the Johnson & Johnson fortune, explores this question in this eye-opening and humorous documentary, interviewing some of the wealthiest Americans.

March, Date TBA. Cruz Reynoso: Sowing the Seeds of Justice is a compelling portrait of controversial former California Supreme Court Justice and winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2000), the United State's highest civilian honor. The film chronicles Reynoso's 50-year fight to eradicate discrimination as a civil rights lawyer amidst turbulent California politics of the mid-20th century.

April 7 — Play Again asks, "Is nature no longer important to our kids?" Filmmakers explore the lives of our children many of whom who spend more time playing in the virtual realm than in nature. The six teenagers in the film spend between five and fifteen hours every day interacting with screens. The film follows them during their first wilderness experience. Experts present research pertaining to kids removed from nature.

IN MEMORIAM

JILL STEPHANIE SOUSA

December 13, 1946 – December 25, 2010

Stanislaus CONNECTIONS, published by the Modesto Peace/Life Center, has promoted non-violent social change since 1971. **Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the center or editorial committee.** CONNECTIONS encourages free speech to serve truth and build a more just, compassionate, peaceful and environmentally healthy community and world. We seek to enhance community concern, bridge interests of diverse groups. CONNECTIONS' editorial committee views peace as built on economic and social justice and equal access to the political process. We welcome pertinent signed articles - to 800 words - and letters with address, phone number. We edit for length, taste, error and libel. Deadline is 10th of the month. Send articles to Myrtle Osner, 1104 Wellesley, Modesto 95350, 522-4967, or email to osnerm@sbcglobal.net or Jim Costello jcostello@igc.org.

Photos and ADS should be submitted as high-resolution JPEG or TIFF files. Do NOT submit as pdf files if possible.

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New Year's Eve and a bodhran

By DANIEL NESTLERODE

On New Year's Eve I was at home in my still not-completely-unpacked apartment. I was watching Alfred Hitchcock's *Secret Agent* on my computer with a cat on my lap. A good movie and a warm cat in somewhat drafty apartment can give the most intrepid seeker of new musical experiences second thoughts about venturing into the night. No matter what night of the year it is. I had accepted an invitation to play mandolin and join in the fun at the monthly Contra Dance in Sonora at Aronos Hall, but I could not decide if I wanted to go.

In a moment of action, I shook off the enervation. Callie, whose name is short for Calliope, Califia, Calaban, or Calico depending upon her mood, felt the sting of cool air on her paws as I simply got up out of my chair and deposited her unceremoniously on the floor. At the moment she landed, I would bet her mood shifted to Califia, dark Queen of the mythological island of California. If she could speak she would have said, "We are not amused" or maybe, "Off with his head."

Sometimes it is best not to think but to do. Without actually deciding, I just got up, grabbed my mandolins, and walked out the door. The fifty-mile drive from Modesto to Sonora provided ample time for reflection on my situation, my future, and my past. None of my conclusions are worth mentioning here. I have forgotten them. But I do remember what I did that night.

I arrived a little late, but no one seemed to mind. My instrument cases announced my intention to join the band, and I quickly found Steve near the center of the action on the stage, with a London cabbie's hat on his head and a fiddle under his chin. He gestured for me to join him, so I entered the hall and quickly ensconced myself among my fellow musicians.

The band was pretty big by American traditional folk music standards, consisting three fiddle players, two mandolin players (including yours truly), two bodhran players, a flute player, a harmonica player, a guitar player and a banjo player.

(A bodhran is a Celtic drum with a single head usually about 12" to 14" in diameter. Right handed players rest the edge of the bodhran on their left knee in a seated position, manipulate the tone of the drum with their left hands, and strike the head of the drum with various beaters held in their right hands. It is a very expressive instrument when played well. But playing it well is much more difficult than it looks. The techniques used to strike the drum are difficult to master. Thus bad bodhran players abound, and the bodhran has become the subject of nearly as many jokes as the banjo. It does not help that the proper pronunciation of bodhran rhymes with moron.)

The instrumental content was definitely a liberal mix of Celtic musicians and what is known among players of other traditional American folk music as "Old Timey." For me this was a treat. I got to learn some more about playing Celtic music while using some of my current repertoire. Indeed I discovered that Old Timey and Celtic music use the same tune structure: everyone plays the melody in unison usually three times through a 32-bar tune.

Playing mandolin affords me the luxury of 1) helping with the melody when I know it or can reasonably mimic it in time or 2) playing chords in support of the melody. I



did plenty of both but was happiest playing along with the melody. Dancers like the tempos on the quick side, and some of those tunes take some skill. So playing them for dancers was excellent practice.

Dances were directed by "callers." These were folks who named the dance, explained the movements, led all of the dances through a practice round, and then shepherded the dancers through the first few sets of steps. From the stage, the dances looked fun and tended to create interesting visual patterns. I tried taking photos of the dancers with my cell phone, but still images cannot convey the sometimes kaleidoscopic effect of the coordinated movements of more than two dozen people. Instead the photos make the whole process look confused and sloppy rather than coordinated and fairly precise.

The event ran from 8 p.m. to just after midnight. We saw the New Year in with balloon popping, hooting and hollering, and a very folksy rendition of "Auld Lang Syne."

Most of the musicians and callers had decided to continue their celebrations past the time that the hall was available. So we relocated to a private home in Sonora. In the new location, more traditional forms of New Year's celebration aids appeared (alcohol was not allowed in Aronos Hall) and instrument cases opened once again revealing their contents. We played long into the night passing around the opportunity to call a tune. But it was more party than jam, and at 2 in the morning, my fatigue level told me it was time to roll back down the hill.

Singing is an excellent way of staying awake on the road. But make sure the songs you pick are songs you know well. Choose music you loved as teenager, stuff that calls up times and places you remember fondly. Your mind will stay engaged and your eyes will stay open. I listened and sang to Dan Fogelberg's *Souvenirs* and Donald Fagen's *The Night Fly*. They kept me engaged the whole way home and staved off droopy eyelids.

I returned to her majesty's kingdom at about 3:30 a.m., though at that time of night/morning Callie is more Calico than Califia. She was curled up in the chair we had been sharing before I so abruptly departed. I greeted my furry flat-mate, dropped my instrument cases inside the door, locked it behind me, and hit the bed feeling utterly exhausted and satisfied with another evening's musical adventure.