

EYES WIDE OPEN
March 19, 2007
Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda

Comments by Becky Lourey

Four years and 10 days ago, in this building, in the Senate Chamber, I attempted to read a resolution against going to war unilaterally in Iraq – 18 State Senators had signed it with me.

There was opposition to the reading; I asked for a reason for that opposition. One of the reasons given was that war in Iraq had no state significance no state significance.

This is a situation where you don't want to be right ... saying, "I told you so," gives no comfort what-so-ever. The Generals who opposed the war, the Historians who opposed the war, the Expert Soldiers who opposed the war ... what satisfaction lies in not having been listened to when such devastation surrounds us, when the world situation we leave our children here in the United States - and the children of our entire world - is more dangerous than it was before.

So here we are – the 4th Anniversary of the dishonest invasion of Iraq – and what can we do about it?

The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths who are committed to social justice, peace and humanitarian service, a group that believes in the worth of every person and faith, and in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice, has brought to us today this powerful exhibit. Each pair of boots honors a military casualty.

When I first attended this exhibition at St. Kates, I thought I wouldn't be able to look at the boots representing Matt. But with loving, Catholic sisters of faith giving me strength, I walked over to the boots representing Minnesotans. I stood by Matt's pair of boots – I could see Matt standing there. I bent down and rearranged the boots, heels touching, toes pointed out, just as Matt stood. It was important to me. I returned twice, and saw that no one had reset the boots side by side, but left them just as Matt stood.

But how does this help us solve our conflicts differently? And how does sorrow at our own losses help us to understand the losses of others, to find that empathy which I have come to believe is one of the most important elements of a cohesive society and a possible peaceful world.

Again, I want to recognize the further commitment of the American Friends Service Committee for their extremely important work entitled **DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES**. This work is a memorial to Iraqis who have lost their lives in the war and during the occupation. It conveys the unseen side of the war in Iraq – the tragedy being experienced by Iraqis every day. It underscores the truth that Minnesota’s own, brave Sami Rasouli tells us every time he returns from his mission in Iraq where he has created the *Muslim Peacemaker Teams*. When Sami goes to Iraq, he sees the real world, not the narrow protected world most dignitaries see when they visit. “Come with me,” Sami Rasouli says, “You might see some different things than you’ve seen before.” Sami knows firsthand about the Iraqi families looking for their sons in the American Secret Prisons. The mother of 19 year old Rafid who was arrested when he went to visit his grandfather pleads, “I would give anything, everything I own to any one who tells me about Rafid.” You can read about Rafid’s plight and Sami Rasouli’s truths by googling Sami Rasouli and selecting the *LJA Event Report*.

Sami Rasouli’s invitation to come with him enhances the mission of EYES WIDE OPEN. Sami states that there can be no peace in Iraq until the U.S. troops are out of the country. He says, “Occupation and democracy do not fit together.” (Quote from Doug Grow’s March 12th column in the Star Tribune). So many military personnel serving in Iraq, starting with my son, Matt, have told me that we are occupiers there. We are fueling the insurgency. A John Hopkins University Study, published in *The Lancet* on October 11, 2006, finds that between 420,000 and 790,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the war and political violence in these last 4 years. I keep imagining myself in the place of the Iraqis. So 655,000 – think of it – **655,000** of my neighbors dead from this war. Dead, and when I was mourning Matt, I had a bed, electricity, running water, to comfort me as I grieved – do they? Figure 10 times that number injured, consider the mental challenges – how many families affected with no pillow for their head as they weep.

We must open our eyes, and we must open our minds. We must start to think of this world, this little green earth, as one – one people, one world. Sami Rasouli speaks to people of all religions when he says, “one God, one people” (Doug Grow, March 12th)

I dwell on this – I spend sleepless nights. I hear all around me that our soldiers have died for God and for our Country. Then I hear people around me criticize those warring persons in Iraq who kill themselves for their God and their Country. This causes us to examine the question: is there a difference? And then consider this story: wounded soldiers, suffering deeply from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or exposure to Agent Orange or Depleted Uranium, tell me that when they are told they are heroes or heroines, they suffer even more deeply because they know how many people they shot or bombed – they are human beings with souls, and they don’t feel like heroes.

Do you lie awake thinking about this? Could this be what EYES WIDE OPEN believes we should do? Become sleepless and search our souls?

Do you lie awake and consider the response to 9/11 – what if we had gone after the evil of it by declaring it a crime – which it was – rather than waging war? Who wanted it to be a war and why? We must examine motives and intention and ramifications before we take action.

Do you lie awake at night thinking about the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moving the minute hand of the Doomsday Clock from 7 to 5 minutes to midnight? This decision was made by the BAS Board of Directors and its Board of Sponsors, which includes 18 Nobel Laureates in part because of the increasing dangers from the spread of nuclear weapons in a world of violent conflict and a renewed emphasis on the military utility of nuclear weapons.

EYES WIDE OPEN leads us to thoughtful and considered action. We must study and we must meditate for our mission is not a simple one, but it is terribly urgent. I have thoughtfully considered the very depressing 1931 to 1932 correspondence between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. Both men desired, and knew the importance of, ending wars. They sought to do so even as they acknowledged failure in the past. Einstein writes to Freud: “This is the problem: Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war? It is common knowledge that, with the advance of modern science, this issue has come to mean a matter of life and death for Civilization as we know it; nevertheless, for all the zeal displayed, every attempt at its solution has ended in lamentable breakdown.”

Freud answers, after deep deliberation, how difficult it would be. He states, “All my life I have had to tell people truths that were difficult to swallow.” Yet he goes on with ways that it might happen for his friend Einstein. He says that. “Brute force is overcome by union”. Then, however, he cautions that it could become communal and not individual violence, so he recommends constraints against communal violence and writes, “This recognition of a community of interests engenders among the members of the group a sentiment of unity and fraternal solidarity which constitutes its real strength.”

Do we dare feel hope? Not unless we pay attention and each of us takes action. It could be as simple as educating ourselves and paying attention to history. Einstein writes, “It would almost appear that the very domain of human activity most crucial to the fate of nations is inescapably in the hands of wholly irresponsible political leaders.” Later he continues, “I have especially in mind that small but determined group, active in every nation, composed of individuals who, indifferent to social considerations and restraints, regard warfare, the manufacture and sale of arms, simply as an occasion to advance their personal interests and enlarge their personal authority.” I was reminded here of the warning to us by a responsible political leader, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who adamantly and passionately warned us to beware the “military and industrial complex”.

We now have weapons that can destroy the planet. We must find a new way to deal with conflict. Consider how teachers and mothers deal with conflict on the playground – they use diplomacy and consequences because they know every child is precious. Let us learn and develop new tools. If our only tool is a hammer, then every conflict looks like a nail.

Let's consider the damage done from the Iraq war that we can (kind of) count to date:

American Military Casualties	3218
American Military Wounded	24,000 to 100,000

(a significant number of these wounded are suffering from psychiatric or behavioral health issues)

700,000 children with their parent or parents deployed to war

Numerous businesses failed because business owner/entrepreneur was absent

Funding and services for returning veterans cut, inadequate and insensitive.

I thought of our veterans last week as I read the Rule of St. Benedict on the wall of St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth: ***"Care must be taken of the sick that they be served in very truth as Christ is served."***

..... and again, hundreds of thousands Iraqis dead, and unconscionable numbers wounded.

What can we do? We want to make a difference. It is ironic to read over and over the quotes of the young people who died in Iraq say they joined the military because they wanted to make a difference.

Instead of helping, we have harmed
Instead of building, we have torn apart
Instead of moving away from nuclear war, we have moved closer
Instead of being trusted as a nation, we have lost respect

We must use the powerful tools of our democracy to react in hope rather than fear.
We must use the powerful tools of our democracy to respect those who are different from us.

We must use the powerful tools of our democracy to act in the best interests of the many rather than the economic advantage of the few.

We must work to establish a Department of Peace in our US Government so that a Secretary of Peace, who pays attention to ending violence both at home and abroad, sits in the President's Cabinet beside the Secretary of Defense.

We must keep our EYES WIDE OPEN in order to see the truth, not just during wartime but during peaceful times as well.