

By RD Armstrong

The Well-Placed Carrot

There is a smoking gun

There are hands dripping

With the blood of innocents

There are vast stores of

Weapons of mass destruction

Hidden from the prying eyes

Of UN inspection

There are unpaid debts

And economies held hostage

There is a training camp

For terrorists

There is a crazed man

In charge of it all

And a room full of advisors

Planning the next attack

Scripting what we will

And will not know

Twisting the truths to fit

The scenarios

Feeding the words into

The earpiece of the speaker

Dipping the brush into the whitewash

Defining what *is* is

Putting the right *spin* on each news item

Leading the people to the correct understanding

Because as we all know the people

Are like children and need a simple

Explanation before granting consent

To the ruling junta to do what they will

The evidence is clear

The file is stamped:

Made in America.

By Monique Buckner

**A Prayer for Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi
(28 February 1992 - 12 March 2006)**

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?

For the soldiers were uninvited in Iraq,
cowardly thugs who intruded their way into a humble family home.
They waited and watched like hawks from their checkpoints,
sent by the hawks in Washington
to replace one form of tyranny with another.
They taunted the family until the fateful ambush of the household that day in March,
except for the two sons who were spared
butchery by being in school at the time;
the parents mistakenly believed their two daughters to be safer at home during those troubled
times.
The soldiers brought their wretchedness and brutality
to a mother, a father, and two young daughters.

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?
Supreme power, idle and passive,
impotent and cruel.
Hallowed be Thy Name?

Their people in Kentucky excused them as broken soldiers,

heroes turned bad through combat fatigue,
who should not be given the death sentence
(‘murdered’) for their moral defects.
Steven Dale Green diagnosed with an anti-social personality disorder;
but what of the others?
Why such a prevalence of disturbed and dangerous individuals in one company?
Those monsters had access to psychological assistance!
The blame fell instead on the deaths of fellow soldiers,
an ‘excuse’ for this premeditated attack on civilians,
surviving as best they could under occupation.

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?

Pernicious lies!
Tellingly, the most brutality reserved for the girl who was used,
shot several times in her face until dead,
her body, as evidence of the war crime,
burned and blamed on ‘insurgents’.
(This is what you get for harbouring terrorists,
the surviving brothers were told
by a self-righteous, insensitive and grossly misinformed US soldier
before the grim truth came to light.)

But perhaps the soldier’s already-known substance abuse,
lack of education and jail seasoning
was seen as an advantage,
a weapon to be used against this civilian population?
America,
not losing much by sending its human waste
to Iraq,
the mentally unstable, armed maniacs, left unsupervised,
to kill, or be killed.
Forgive our racist hearts
and hallowed be the names of the un-named dead,
the Iraqis,
the real broken people.

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?

Did that Kentucky jury understand the portentousness of Steven Dale Green's
offensive suggestions to his comrades?
His admission of unrestrained animal cravings,
revealing his true depravity and discriminatory views on women,
his vicious mentality?

One more crime,
one more crime to be barely catalogued by history
or analyzed by an insensible public.

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?

Thy will be done-
to run over Iraqi children with tanks,
to torture in Abu Ghraib,
and similar human rights violations elsewhere,
half-a-million dead Iraqi children during the embargo
seen as 'worth it',
not from a L'Oreal promotion,
but from US Ambassador Madeleine Albright,
defending mass murder in the form of infanticide.

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?

Father, are you sickened and satiated with this destruction yet?
Enough to unleash your divine punishment?
No eye-for-an-eye?
But perhaps some deranged fellow inmate of Green's
will bring into effect your veritable verse,
on earth as it is in heaven.
And give us, the overfed, well-off and wasteful industrialized nations
our daily bread, and more,
while giving the bulk of humanity the crumbs.
Starve them to death in war as in disaster as in peace.
As in Iraq.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us.
And forgive those who do not ask for any forgiveness
merely because they believe in your existence?
What did Abeer al-Janabi, a child, do to deserve your wrath, O Father?
The effect of this tragic massacre on her surviving brothers,
we can only begin to imagine.
This story, with different victims and details,
repeated how many times,
in how many locations?
Abeer will never again play in the Mahmudiya sunshine
because your armed assassins were led into temptation.
So she was delivered into the hands of evil.

Our Father, who art in heaven, is it not your duty
to protect your children?

For thine is the kingdom of suffering,
the power, neglected or abused,
and the glory dimmed by innocent blood.
May Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi be remembered forever and ever,
the womb of this prayer
her immortality?
Amen.

By David Gould

Return from Guantanamo

Somewhere between the truth

and its victims,

lies the semi truths

we will never ever be told.

Somewhere in a land of secrecy,

of clouded wit

those trapped by a freedom,

held in iron chains,

shackled by manacles,

not seeing the glimmers

of each new day

that turns its shadow,

within its sheltered path:

they supine,

lost within the pain

of never knowing

that they are missed and gone.

We cannot know

all the reasons they were held,

nor ever can anyone tell:

trapped within systems;

of secrets, enigmas,

cryptograms, confidentiality,

of state mysteries,

double bluffs and just plain lies.

Innocence spread

upon the altars of democracy,

rarely seeing the charge

against them to defend.

How can we defend

such actions in our names;

these miscarriages of justice,

that most of us

just choose not to see?

By Suzanne Hayes

I met a man. A gentle, polite man with a discernible accent, but very good

English, a beard and moderately ethnic dress—who tells me that he is an immigrant, that he has been in this

country, this wonderful country that he loves, for 25 years and that

he's retired from the City of New York.

His son is being held in solitary confinement in the Manhattan Correctional Facility downtown for the crime of allowing a suspected terrorist to sleep on his couch. In his prison cell, he is allowed no books,

no newspapers that are less than 30 days old, no radio, and only one

family member can visit him for one hour every two weeks.

He has no cellmates, no one to talk to and is not allowed to exercise on the

roof facility like the other prisoners, nor may he exercise in his cell.

He tells me how grateful he is that I have come to his son's hearing

to show my support. He tells me

that all of his former co-workers and neighbors are so kind and

loving, that they all cried when they heard what happened to his son---

"All of them!" he said.

"They feel for me and after 9/11, they came to

my defense and showed me their friendship. This is the real America!" he

tells me. "Not this! Not this place of injustice, of seemingly deaf

judges and twisted laws."

His son is being held under SAMs, I find out. Special Administrative

Measures, which basically means that one's Constitutional rights

are no longer valid if you fit a certain profile—the SAMs profile.

Originally meant for crime bosses who were able to

order hits from prison, it now fits the "terrorist" profile and is

being used accordingly.

"The real America is a wonderful country," the father tells me in his

gentle soft-spoken manner.

"Thank you for caring about my son."

"We're going to try to get musicians to come to the prison and play

music for him so that he can hear it," I tell him,

"so that he'll know we care about

his sanity—that way he can feel connected."

I am actually very worried that no matter how hard we try

or how loud we play,

he won't be able to hear it.

"Somehow, hopefully, he'll know we're there," I say.

"This should not be happening in this country, not in this country,

no, it should not." he tells me.

I have to agree.

I met another man. With a large belly straining against the buttons of his white button-down collar shirt, open at the double-chin.

He was sitting next to me on a plane. He said he

worked with the State Department. Not AT the State Department, WITH

the State Department. George W. Bush was still the president.

"Oh? What do you do?" I asked.

He never managed to articulate what he

did there, just that he was a VIP, that he knew all the top men in the

administration. They listened to him, he told me. He was fatuous and

self-important, this man. I imagine he still is.

"We have to win the war on terror, you know. These Muslims, they

aren't like us. They believe in violence to promote their religion."

"You do remember The Crusades?" I ask him. "The slaughter of Muslims and

Jews who refused to convert to Christianity? And the Inquisition, of

course."

"Well, that was 900 years ago! At least we've become civilized since

then!"

I think about the bombings of abortion clinics and the shootings of

doctors, and I can't see how that's civilized. But I say nothing.

He tells me he knows everything about Muslims and the Middle East

because he read Uris's 'The Haj.'"

"He is a novelist, you know. He writes fiction," I say. "I assume you

know, then, that the definition of the word Islam is peace?"

"Who told you that? How do you know that?!" he barks at me, his eyes

bulging and his face reddening.

"Um, common knowledge?" I reply, trying to remain polite, while

beginning to feel a bit threatened.

We quickly reached a stalemate. He was glad to end our conversation,

speaking blasphemy as I was, but feeling like he got the last word.

I think to myself now that if not for the incarceration of his son,

I would never have met the patient, loving immigrant father—

I am hoping that our efforts to inform the public of the unconscionable

treatment of his son will lead to others also feeling outrage about

his treatment.

But the man on the

plane stays in my mind.

"This is the real America!" he told me, emphatically.

Um...yeah.

By Henry Lovett Howard

Nightmares In the Water

Water my dreams

With the liquid ooze of nightmares.

The steady drip-drip-drip

On the prisoner's face

Echoes the ritual of water torture

Across the ages.

Here is a curious paradox:

Water fills three-fourths of the human body,

Yet we can drown in it.

Someone who believes we have something to hide

Can fill our mouth and nose and lungs

Until they crave explosion,

Then sit on our swollen bellies

As we gasp confessions to non-existent crimes.

In the time of the Inquisition,

Water was poured from a vinegar jar

Until it soaked a rag in the victim's throat,

And he confessed to being in league with the Devil.

In the Middle Ages, the warriors of God

Threw women in a pond, weighted with rocks.

If they drowned, they were innocent

And received a Christian burial.

If they floated,

They were burned at the stake as witches.

To drown was to be saved.

There have been many refinements

To the basic *tortura del agua*:

The vinegar jar and suffocating rag far back in the throat

Have been replaced by things that call to mind

The comforts of home:

The running faucet,

The watering can,

The bathtub.

Here in the United States of Euphemisms,

The honest horror of “water torture”

Has been replaced by a softer word

We are less likely to choke on: “waterboarding.”

What clever mind-games to play with word-games!

What a media-friendly way to describe,

With modern blandness,

The ancient terror of confession through drowning!

But wait, we are told, it’s only *simulated* drowning.

There are doctors standing by,

And master psychologists,

Trained to know unerringly

When the body surrenders,

And the soul is ready to be saved.

Waterboarding--such simple ingredients, to cause such pain:

A flat wooden board,

With restraints for the thrashing hands and feet;

A thick cloth or towel,

Or a perfectly ordinary cellophane wrap

To encase the head in a facial coffin,

Until breath collapses inside the saturated mask.

Waterboarding: the sport of torturers and interrogators

And Presidents, who soothe our worst fears

About the soul of our nation

By promising that we *never* practice torture,

Only “enhanced interrogation.”

Never mind the legions of politicians and pundits,

Therapists and thinkers,

Army brass and common soldiers,

Interrogators and their prisoners,

Those few who have survived their baptism by fire

Of confession through controlled drowning--

None who speak a common tongue,

But have a common word for waterboarding: Torture.

But all the President's men have assured him

That it isn't.

The top legal minds his money can buy

Fill him with oatmeal justifications

He can easily digest:

This is a "different" kind of war,

With a special kind of enemy.

Waterboarding leaves no marks,

Causes no lasting physical harm.

Of course, permanent damage to the mind doesn't count.

The fact that we must stage

This hideous intellectual debate

Over whether, and when, and how, to inflict torture,

Or if flooding the face and lungs until a human being

Screams like an animal

Because death has him by the throat

Is really torture after all,

Is a mental torture too great for me to bear.

I think I will go for a swim,

Submerge my head in water,

Wash away my sins and cleanse my soul,

And perhaps, just for a moment,

Tilt my head back in the shallow end of the pool,

Let the water flood my lungs and nose and mouth,

And see how long I can refuse to answer the angry questions

Of a friend who holds me by my hair.

It is only an experiment,

But in three seconds, I know I will tell him

Everything he wants to hear.

As our national debate rages on,

Night falls somewhere

On the lonely towers

Of a clandestine prison.

Desperate men,

By now thinking only

Of the families left behind,

Are shown the waterboarding room.

It all looks so innocent, so harmless.

Then the first “high-value” target

Is strapped to the board,

Head tilted downwards,

Feet pointed heavenwards.

The questions start flying,

The cold liquid flows across his mercifully hidden face,

And a primal scream fills the darkened halls

As nightmares in the water begin.

Pictures at an Exhibition

When I saw the first photos from Abu Ghraib,

I nearly gagged:

A hooded man covered with electric wires,

Desperately balancing on a child-sized box;

Smiling soldiers beside a pyramid they made

Of naked Iraqi men,

Piled and bound in the rough stone casements

Of a desert prison where no one could hear them scream.

Like an exhibition of ourselves

Caught in grotesque tableaux,

The pictures make us look at things

We do not want to believe,

About the people we are told are given the power

To protect the whole free world;

Only nothing is free, and power often comes

At the expense of truth.

Then, too, the pictures make us ask questions

And seek answers perhaps we would rather not have:

Is all this the responsibility of one country and one time?

Could we be those very same soldiers,

In another prison and another war?

Everyone is scrambling to condemn the pictures

And distance themselves from their uniquely personal horror,

From the politicians who ordered this war

On down to the young men and women

Who eat the choking sand,

And dodge the mortars that come in fresh volleys of fire

Whenever new pictures of the abuse stream onto television screens

And newspapers throughout the world.

Our leaders and foot soldiers alike

Assure us that it is only the failure of “a few bad apples,”

Never an official policy that condones torture.

A “few bad apples?”

Have we forgotten the execution ditches of Vietnam and El Salvador,

Ordered at the highest levels and dug by our own hands,

Or by death squads trained on our own soil?

The bones of My Lai and El Mozote

Shift uneasily beneath the charred Grass

Whenever we say there is no “official policy”

That condones such things,

For the pictures are there to contradict.

One photo of the abuse particularly chills me:

That of a huge guard dog snarling at a naked and cowering

Iraqi prisoner.

There were guard dogs just like that one

Who snarled at naked prisoners descending from the trains

At Auschwitz,

Or snapped at the heels of black children

Running for their lives in Birmingham.

Some dear friends of mine,

Who lead lives founded on compassion for others,

Recently argued with my fury over the prison abuse scandal.

After all, they reminded me,

Saddam Hussein did so much worse,

And the world scarcely condemned him—

As if somehow that makes it alright

To use the same execution chambers and rape rooms

For interrogations, beatings and torture that is somewhat less severe.

My friends were mostly angered

By the stupidity of photographing it all,

The arrogance of believing

That only the eyes of those on Tier1A

Would see the lurid images,

While the world's image of us as liberators

Would go on unimpeded.

I worry about that, as well.

I, too, am an American, after all,

And I do not want to see our young men and women

Gunned down in ever greater numbers,

While those above them hide their guilt

From photos that display battered human beings

As war trophies.

So my friends and I battle

Over the meaning of the pictures,

Perhaps too loudly for too long,

Until their youngest daughter tells us not to talk any more politics

Because it's giving her a headache.

It all gives me a headache, too,

Only I can't forget that some politicians told me

We're supposed to be winning the hearts and minds

Of the Iraqi people.

Exactly how, when their hearts break

And their minds burn with rage,

In a society where sexual humiliation

Is akin to cultural genocide?

When pictures in an exhibition

Speak louder than words,

There comes a moment when words themselves

Cannot be held back.

They come at first in a whisper,

No louder than violin notes carried by a breeze,

But relentlessly, until they are heard

By another person, then another, and still another,

Beginning always with one small voice that says,

“I can’t live with this anymore,

I will be silent no longer,

I will tell what I have seen.”

Such is the way the name,

Abu Ghraib,

Has come to be part of our collective vocabulary,

And our collective conscience.

We are not used to groping forward

Through exhibit halls of such dark self-portraits,

But this heartbreak may yet bring out

The best in us.

Perhaps the photos of Abu Ghraib

May force all people who have seen them

To look at themselves and at each other,

At the ways they see and are seen,

And learn a new way of knowing and feeling that may lead one day

To far different pictures at an exhibition.

By Elizabeth Lazdins

Right Now

Right now.

Like Spirits,

Victims

Of our government's brutality

Stand,

Silently,

Among Us.

We can't see their suffering,

Or hear their screams,

But the stain

Of our inhumane behavior

Is like a gruesome spot-

Which will never

Wash out

Of the fabric

Of Our flag.

Under the stars and stripes,

We all struggle and sweat for some

American Dream.

Under the red

White

And blue,

Red stripes of blood flow,

Stars never to be seen.

White fear from simulated drowning,

Blue throbbing neck, arms and legs

From stress positions

Tied up.

Broken bodies: arms, eyes, hands,

Broken like Us,

Internally bleeding.

Humiliation,

Sleep deprivation,

Starvation,

Or forced feeding.

Death threats on wives and children.

All unseen

But still

Among Us.

In this supposed democracy,

Our government is Us,

If it is Us

Then we too are torturers!

80,000 people illegally detained,

(Not counting

The ever increasing

Racist assault

On migrants and black human beings

On these very streets!)

We will NOT stay silent while

Criminals

Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice

And

Complicit democratic congress

Reap the profits

Of corporate greed,

Justify torture

In Our names!

Call a criminal what- he- is!

John Yoo- Criminal!

Lawyer,

Distinguished professor?!

John Yoo- Criminal!

Created a memo

To violate the Geneva Convention.

The memo

Which has justified

Thousands of unheard

Screams, pleas and tears,

Justified

Unseen, uncleaned

Urine, vomit & spit.

Black bags,

Over heads,

In the blackest of days

Never to be seen again.

Charge John Yoo with war crimes!

Speak out!

And Get Up against torture!

Don' wait for a savior,

No compromise with criminals,

Be horrified that

Humans

Just like Us

Are victims!

And be wary,

What is used on them,

By unconstitutional law,

Is

On

Its

Way

Home.

By Angela Consolo Mankiewicz

Monsters

We make them out of the blood of instinct,

nurtured by a resident ethos

to propagate the natural order.

We make them out of received dreams,

spied in a mirror,

unmindful of cracked corners.

If we see cracks,

we plug them with putty and tell ourselves

nothing is perfect.

When the putty begins to crack,

we patch a little more and go on

about our business.

One day, we notice a chunk of glass

dangling off a splinter,

threatening to shatter.

When it does, we shield our eyes,

pick out shards with ungloved fingers

and delicately paste back what's left

for the next generation.

RantChant: What To Tell Kristen About 21st Century Torture

or Guide For Discussing Human Rights With Your 8-Year old*☐☐

Ice-Breakers:

Define human cruelty

and degradation and

how we try to stop it and

why it doesn't stop

Topics For **Basic Remedial Work:**

What a human right is

What instincts are

About human nature

What good and bad mean

Correcting **A/Im-moral Educations:**

Why we have to teach human rights

Why some people don't have any

What kind of people Americans are,

could be, have been, should be

What decency means

What honor means

Advanced Topics as **Applicable:**

Imagine the future

Imagine a better one and

how to build it - willfullness

required, talent optional

If your child falls asleep,

wake the child up and

start again, or,

you can say nothing

in a loud and bitter voice.

**Inspired by Antler's poem "How To Explain the War To Your Children," published in CHIRON REVIEW, 2004.*

By Mark Prime

An Enduring Torture

...The golden-haired children seemed in their own peace filled world as
hungry giants walked heavily and with great anger over the wilderness...

In this tale of time, this poem, there's not enough room for everyone to sit,
some will have to stand and merrily wait their turn at the gates of anguish.
Soon you will be able to taste what your sons and daughters have swilled-
your aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, nieces and nephews; the sufferers.

Above our heads, even in anguish, rises a cry so profound that it must be a dream of man's making, a face filled with the delight of our trust, our love, our freedom. Upon this blue throne we call earth, our collective heart moves freely among us, yet our hands and feet trace drops of blood over this painting. We turn our backs on the trees and the rivers and we beat down upon the soil with metal drums of war. We long to conquer our immense fear of things outside of this air, so demons claw at our bellies and slash at our throats to get a single breath of air and a chance to speak with us, to tell us why we are a cheerless lot and to clarify, explain to us our immeasurable and never-ending sorrow.

There are the screams of the oppressed, the cries of the starving offspring, the tears of the childless mothers and fathers, and the beating of truth in each of us. It's never been outside of our reach. It has always been and will remain within each of us, gestations of the human stain.

Open your mouth wide and bestow this birth to one another, our lone salvation, our reckoning with truth and beast and the earth's nectar. Celebrate kindness, not its converse aberration, torture. It is waiting upon our approval, nothing more and nothing less...

And We Stand Still

And we stand still,
Seemingly unmoved by it all.
And we stand still,
Force the broken rubble together,
To the crimson clay and gray maggots we leave our breathing,
Feet stuck down in the red earth.

Do we know what it is that we have done?
Forgive me... We know not...

Writhing limbs beneath the ground
Unmoved of the dulled shanking sorrow
Broken by the distant flow of murder
Dejected of all the slighted affections
Replaced by a programmable worry
Struck anesthetized of bone-shrieking pain
Vanished by the good God damned dash
Pushed back to the very dread filled end
Trampled flat by the gush of skin
Stopped short of inhaling lethal shame
Turned off from what's not the same
Blinded by the inundation of labor
Wrought immobile by the last quaver
Succumbed to hunger and greed
Paled of piercing a blood-red deed

Do we know what it is that we have done?
Forgive me... We know not...

O the flesh and bone and blood, and blood and blood-
Murderous days and nights
Of the world's child
By our conscious monstrosity!
Again and again, without moving,
Planted there in the earth!
We are living and breathing
Yet we might as well die away,
Pass on down, end, vanish, fade...

Who could possibly want what we have;
Freedom with feet wedged beneath the ground,
God without a miserable mince of goodness,
Equality with white-faced conditions?
Hope is a four letter word.
Writhing limbs beneath the ground.
What? What? What? Goddamnit! What?

We're not alive, at least not our senses; reality.
Why not place our bodies entirely under
If we're just going to stand so unhappily silent?
Surely we've nothing worth continuing for,
Surely we'd be better off if we sunk complete,
Better than remaining red-faced, horrifyingly immobile

With no weight to bear from such empty spirits...

It Matters

It matters what we do.
The liberation possesses us
Like death owns our bones.
While we beam a maw of daggers
The freeway writhes next to us
Like a pit of angry snakes.
A liberty bell protests pointlessly in the harbor,
Some ashen patriot, or adolescent, must be torturing it...

Let's not conjure this painting further.
Forget about the relentless racket.
Forget about freedom for a moment.
Think only of the terror stuffed deep down
Like a wellhead pawing the ocean floor,
Think only of ourselves and our callous skin,
An opportunity to taste such bitterness;
How acerbic and most foul to live without conscience...

Undisclosed History

Deep beneath the aching ground of our state, writhing,
twisting in the blood soaked layer below the screams
of the tortured and weep-filled living flesh, subdued,
a powerful schemer hunkers down
within his coward's cave,
cackling of the anguish wrought by his reign
and sneering unto himself and the fool.
Mountains majesty, amber waves of grain
Blown back of the voice of shackles
and ropes tightly bound to their pain...

O! The sand and dust walking over the sorrow-born, lifeless limbs
making chains with the wind around the hopeless, must weep...

Deep below, the schemer whispers, "I'm the king"
from out his sallow lips to messengers sworn to secrecy
while the bombs above fall void unto his ears.
Evoking now the quietude of tyranny's frame
he brings, blaring, the monstrous memories of what men can do!
And as they each move within the spiritless cave
he bows unto them, knees bent in half worship
uttering "What fools these patriots be."

And the bombs fall silent unto this horde
of deviant beasts hunkered with themselves
and the stench of wafting hell,
yet only one shadow is cast across the floor...

Deep thundering now rolls, callous and yellow
like unending parades of pride filled processions;
lockstep, closed mind, tight fisted, greedy and senseless;
marching in honor of tomorrow's bereavement,
inventing a country's God-spurned eternity
of falling, plummeting rockets red glare
tumbling down, down, down
to the echoes of the past...

O hubris fondling the earth,
filling placid waters and pawing the trees, come!
End this! Thrust thy spear through the breach,
surprise even the memory of monstrous history
that death has found them there...

