

---

# COMMON SENSE II

---

*Capitalizing on the familiarity and influence of Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense” pamphlets that provided American colonists with exposure to the conversation of great thinkers in the pre-Revolutionary period, this paper assumes the name COMMON SENSE II. Similarly, today’s series of pamphlets strives to give a direct response to great political events and ideas of our time.*

---

June 2022

Right to Life Issue

Vol. 17 Issue 6

---

## Power and Hypocrisy

By Valerie Conner

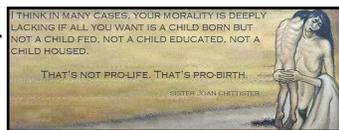
Since our last issue, we in this country have been hit with a double whammy, neither were unexpected, and both have been part of our national debate for years. And so it continues. A woman’s right to a safe and legal abortion and the right of everyone, particularly school children, to be free from gun violence, on the surface, do not appear to be related. I would argue they are.

Underlying both issues is the hypocrisy of the right’s “pro-life” stand.

Abortion did not begin with *Roe*, and *Roe*’s demise won’t end it. It will, however, intimidate some women to carry an unwanted or dangerous pregnancy to term and force others without resources to the same fate. Still others will risk unsafe, illegal abortions, putting their own lives at stake. Where’s their right to life? Abortion is a serious issue and should be taken seriously. That’s where the hypocrisy comes in. While there are people opposed to abortion for any reason on strictly moral grounds whose opinion can be respected, the politicians who use the issue for political gain belie their position by also trying to restrict access to contraceptives, sex education, and post-natal support. Their position is not predicated on a great concern for the life of the fetus or of the woman or of the future of either; it is simply a control grab. It is a way to keep women “in their place.” It is no coincidence that the Women’s Movement hit its stride after oral contraceptives and *Roe* when women were able regulate their family planning and careers.

That created competition in the work place for the men. Their solution was to figure a way to keep women down. Keeping them “barefoot and pregnant” seemed like a good idea.

Since our last issue, we in this country have been hit with a double whammy, neither were unexpected, and both have been part of our national debate for years. And so it continues. A woman’s right to a safe and legal abortion and the right of everyone, particularly school children, to be free from gun violence, on the surface, do not appear to be related. I would argue they are.



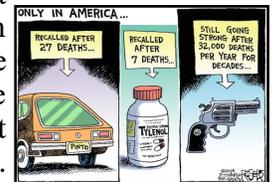
<https://stevnsbrg.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/pro-birth.jpg>

The gun debate is also fraught with hypocrisy. After every highly publicized mass shooting—forget about the daily individual shootings, be they domestic or gang/drug related, everyone else does—people piously keep the families in “their thoughts and prayers” (see Lori’s sermon starting on page 6) most likely because they don’t know what else they can do. Congress knows what else it can do. The NRA knows what else it can do. And deep in our hearts we know what we can do:

- ◆ Congress can pass reasonable gun and ammunition regulations.
- ◆ The NRA can return to representing their members instead of the gun manufacturers.
- ◆ We can openly campaign for and vote for politicians who will support reason.

Largely the same folks who are for radical abortion restrictions, “right-to-lifers,” are the same people who are adamant about keeping their “sporting” military-type weapons in the hands of anyone, whether or not that person has a history of domestic violence, is mentally disturbed, is suicidal, or is just plain mean spirited. They make no distinction, just as they make no distinction of the need/desire for an abortion: a result of unprotected sex or a medical condition threatening the life of the woman.

With either issue, the right refuses to acknowledge nuances of circumstances or the rights of others. Only the fetus has rights—not the woman; only the gun wielder has rights—not the person shot. The bottom line is neither issue is about life but rather about power—theirs. Polls show that both issues are supported by about the same vocal minority, about 30%. But because the majority of voters voted for other issues or didn’t vote, this small minority is in control on these issues. That has created a lot of anger and distrust in this country. hence the police issue (see page 4).



<https://www.awesomelylucvic.com/wp-content/>

# Personhood

By Brian Vroman

A number of years ago, my mother-in-law faced a decision. Her husband, my father-in-law, had suffered a massive heart attack. A Good Samaritan tried to help by applying CPR but to no avail. The flow of blood and the transfer of oxygen to the brain had been interrupted, and my father-in-law was brain dead.

After consulting with the family, my mother-in-law asked the doctors to pull the plug. They could have kept his heart beating indefinitely, but he was brain dead, and so he no longer was. He had been Stan, but Stan was no longer there—just the body that had, a short time before, been Stan.

But let's drill down into this a bit. Was my father-in-law still a human being? Yes. He was a biological entity with 46 chromosomes. He met the definition of a human creature. But he was no longer a person.

When philosophers discuss such issues, they tend to distinguish between being a human and being a person. This is because the definition of *human* can be more or less all encompassing, as in the definition used above: a biological entity with 46 chromosomes. But this is not what is important. What matters is *personhood*. How is a person different from a human? Well, it is possible to be a human person. (It is also possible to be a non-human person, such as a chimpanzee or an intelligent space alien.) Stan was a human person before his heart attack. But it is also possible to be a human but no longer a person. After his heart attack and the loss of oxygen to the brain, Stan fit this category. He was still a human, but his personhood had departed. This is why my mother-in-law was fully justified in choosing to pull the plug and was guilty of no moral offense.

Just as it is possible to have once been a person, it is possible for a biological entity with 46 chromosomes to be a human by the broad definition but not yet a person. To fully understand this, it is necessary to discuss exactly what it means to be a person.

To begin with, a person is self-aware. Self-awareness is something that develops over time. It is not as simple as a light switch. Awareness ultimately allows us to do some pretty special things. A fully actualized, self-aware per-

son is able to feel complex emotions like love and hatred, joy and anger, and sorrow. A person is able to fall in love, to think complex thoughts, to contemplate the nature of the universe. A fully actualized person is able to wonder about deep issues of meaning and purpose. Non-person are not able to do this.

As stated above, personhood is something that develops over time. We should honor personhood even in its early stages of development, even if not fully actualized. However, though personhood develops over time, and though it is hard to say exactly when it begins, it is possible to say when it is not.

An embryo or early fetus is not yet a person. We know this because the brain is not sufficiently developed enough to support even nascent personhood. It may be a potential person. It may be that if all goes a certain



<https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-Cf6O9wtpG4Y/UDcAQ7f0c1I>

way, it will become a person.

But it is not a person yet. Just as Stan had once been a person but was no longer, an embryo may possibly become a person but is not one yet. By contrast, the woman carrying an embryo or early fetus is a fully actualized human person.



<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-z7DRBESN14c/TI4Aub1BFU/>

The point of all this is that a non-person human, whether a former person or a potential person, does not have the same moral status as an actual person. This is why claims that abortion is murder are way off the mark. Only a person can be murdered, but abortion does not take the life of a person and therefore is not murder.

We should, then, defer to the woman as to whether she wishes to carry a pregnancy to term, producing a person. The process is taking place in her body, over which she has autonomy. Pregnancy carries a certain amount of risk. It is up to the woman—a person—whether or not she wants to incur this risk.

Some may ask about late-term abortions. Doesn't a late term abortion end the life of a person?

First, late term abortions are vanishingly rare and are almost always performed in the case of a medical emergency of some sort.



<https://allieidc.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/runde-baby-betten-in-rot.jpg>

(Continued on page 3)



<https://1.wp.com/nursinginfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/personhood.jpeg?>

(Continued from page 2)

By the latter stage of a pregnancy, women are picking out names, buying cribs and diapers, planning baby showers, and so forth. It is just a mistake to think that a woman is going to carry a pregnancy to the third trimester and then suddenly, on a whim, decide she wants an abortion. This just does not happen. There is always some extenuating circumstance when it comes to late abortions.

What about the argument that personhood actually does begin at conception, because God infuses a soul? First, there is no evidence for this. Secondly, it is a religious belief. In America, the right to exercise religion freely is guaranteed. But this does not mean that the religious believer gets to *impose* religious views on others. If someone believes that abortion is wrong due to religious reasons, then that person should not have an abortion. But those of us who are not part of that belief system are not bound by its dictates.

So, in sum, we can say this: A person has a moral status requiring certain obligations on the part of others. It is wrong to unnecessarily hurt a person; it is certainly wrong to kill a person without good reason. To do so is murder.

But a non-person is of a very different moral status, whether it once was a person or may possibly become a person but is not yet a person this is why the overwhelming majority of abortions are justified, and this is why the abortion debate is not about “killing babies”—that does not happen—but about the rights of women.

## Whose Right to Life?

By Pam Dowell

In 1983, I was 22, with an unexpected pregnancy, residing in Texas. A government-forced birth would have traumatically altered the course of my life—physically and mentally.

*Roe v. Wade* was my safeguard. The recent leak of a draft of Supreme Court Justice Alito’s opinion overturning *Roe* is sure to seal the fate of a federal safety net that has protected women since 1973, when the Supreme Court ruled for a pregnant woman’s liberty and right to privacy.

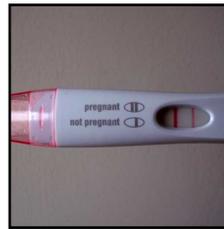
The current turn of events will have devastating consequences for the human rights of women in America, a betrayal of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

My abortion story does not contain sexual vio-

lence, incest, date rape, or a medical catastrophe: the horrific scenarios which anyone with a decent moral compass should be able to comprehend why abortion must remain a human right, safe, and legal.

I was in a steady live-n relationship with a man I loved. I had been training for months for a physical agility test, which was part of a series of tests to become a Fort Worth firefighter. My monthly cycle had been erratic from the intense training.

My partner and I practiced three types of birth control conjunctively: the rhythm method, the Billings method, and condoms. Birth control choices were limited, and the pill with its side effects made me terribly sick.



<https://www.zoombaby.co.uk/wp-content/>

One month, breast tenderness confirmed my greatest fear: our birth control had failed. I was in tears. He was out of state on a work contract, my family was in Minnesota, and there I sat in Texas, feeling very much alone.

We did not want this pregnancy—resolutely—neither of us.

My boyfriend made arrangements for me to join him in California and then get to a women’s clinic. I called my parents, who offered comfort and support, solidly backing my (our) decision to terminate. I told my boss I needed immediate time off, which was graciously granted when I explained the urgency. I also withdrew my application from the firefighting pool and told the captain, my mentor and supporter, why. He hugged me and said he understood. Like my father, he was a father to daughters.

Today, in Texas, the men who sympathetically supported me, could be the same compassionate men sued under the current Texas abortion ban for “aiding” me in our decision to abort. Private citizens with no knowledge of circumstances and no connection to the people involved can report others, creating an abortion police state.

I arrived in California, my boyfriend at my side. The women’s clinic physician talked us through every step of the first trimester process. The procedure was short and done; the discomfort was far less than the monthly cramping I often had during my period. The safe medical abortion was nothing like the propaganda spun by abortion foes.

The abortion narrative needs to be changed: the trauma lies in the unwanted pregnancy. Yet our society has created shame, stigma, and the burden of secret, which places guilt on the women im-

(Continued on page 4)



<https://62e528761d0685343e1e->

(Continued from page 3)

pregnated. Abortion opponents, with total disregard to the social and gender justice of the living women, demand forced birth, a dystopian view eerily played out in Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* and the recent TV adaptation.



Amnesty International declares, "Forcing someone to carry an unwanted pregnancy or forcing them to seek out an unsafe abortion is a violation of their human rights, including rights to privacy and body autonomy."

The following year, 1984, age 23 and single, I returned to Minnesota and to my hometown doctor. I told him about the unwanted pregnancy, our decision to terminate, and my ambivalence toward a society that condemns human sexuality for one gender while championing it for the other.

I paid for and secured a tubal ligation to ensure I would never get pregnant again. My friends—several of them OB/GYN providers—have told me that under the same circumstances today, I could be denied my request for a tubal as a matter of clinic, doctor, or insurance decision. Again, this would place my body autonomy and health choice in the hands of others.

The number of women, who like me want to be child-free, is growing. I'm grateful for the federal law that allowed me freedom over my own reproductive health. Women, infamous and famous, have stated, "If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament." I agree.

My parents supported me because they came from a day and age prior to *Roe v. Wade*, when girls were shuttled out of town to "visit relatives" and conveniently returned home after several months. The book, *The Girls Who Went Away*, should be a staple on every high school bookshelf as a reminder of a society that shamed unwed pregnant girls to give up their babies of face condemnation in their families, churches, and schools. Forced adoptions were a secondary trauma to an unexpected pregnancy.

My mom, Jacqueline Dowell, pictured here, chose nursing as her profession (after my parents divorced in 1972) to fight for women, healthcare, and reproductive rights. She went on to become a volunteer for Planned Parenthood.



I have no regrets. Ever.

Nearly one in four women will have an abortion in her lifetime. Her story may not fit your belief system, but her story, her rights, her body, and her privacy are central to her life. This is the life that must be protected: ethically, constitutionally, and free from religion.



<https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-G1tTR3GFHcc/VG3ERmxxgdl/AAAAAAAAAJ8/Wu-jdRtvcE/s1600/roe%2B%2Bwade.jpg>

Minnesota must keep abortion legal to counter states like Texas. Women have always known we will never go back—not to dangerous, secret, unsafe abortions—not to second class.

I am more determined than ever to battle this cause. I have a car. I will transport others across state lines to safe, legal abortions. Why? Because each one of these women are me. I am not pro-choice; I am pro-abortion. Period.

## The Police—To Protect and Serve: The Oath Keepers

By Bob Passi

Although the phrase "protect and serve" is not the official logo for the police in this country, I think that most people have that basic expectation for any police force to provide some version of that for the public. I am confident that many, if not most, of the police officers in the U.S. are good people who are diligent about doing their duty.



[https://live.staticflickr.com/65535/49646062876\\_4c1ed7e630\\_b.jpg](https://live.staticflickr.com/65535/49646062876_4c1ed7e630_b.jpg)

There is also a generally applicable police officers' oath:

On my honor, I will never betray my integrity, my character, or the public trust.

I will treat all individuals with dignity and respect and ensure that my actions are dedicated to ensuring the safety of my community and the preservation of human life.

I will always have the courage to hold myself and others accountable for our actions.

I will always maintain the highest ethical standards and uphold the values of my community and the agency I serve.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

The concepts contained within this oath provide criteria by which police behavior can be measured in any particular situation: Have the police followed these criteria and if not, where have they fallen short?

### Authority and Responsibility

Perhaps the issues that arise within the society are about the responsibilities that go with the authority connected with the position of being a police officer. That authority comes with the assumption of leadership in situations of conflict, allowing them to take charge with the expectation that their directives are followed. **This is a powerful authority that allows the use of force when necessary in tense situations. Then there is the powerful authority to carry and use weapons in the prosecution of their duties.**



[https://journalistsresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/cops.usdoj.\\_jpg?x12809](https://journalistsresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/cops.usdoj._jpg?x12809)

**The responsibilities to the community and to the individuals who come in contact with police are where the conflict can occur.** Most interactions between the police and the public are relatively normal, although that often may not be the case for the less affluent, racial, or ethnic groups and even some religious groups. This is part of the problem, since those **guides for police actions are not applied equally.**

When it comes to the other part of authority, the processes of taking charge, giving orders, and at times using force to detain—in extreme cases using deadly force—sometimes results in real issues. This is where the adherence to the precepts of policing are crucial. **This is where the utmost professionalism is required to override personal emotions and remember that although some governmental agency has conferred authority upon them, that oath provides the only sustainable reason they have their authority and must be most scrupulously followed.** Only within this framework can that kind of authority make any real sense for all elements of the community.

### Limitations

**There are, of course, limitations to policing, especially in regard to expertise in a range of social and personal issues.** Police are not trained or equipped to deal effectively with issues of mental health or an entire range of social issues and therefore should welcome the help that professionals in those areas can provide in accompaniment

with police officers.

### Community Relationships

**A major priority for any police agency must be to mend community fences to develop trusting relationships. The more such a trust-based relationship can be built, the less the “us-against-them” mentality will prevail. Without that trusting relationship, things can too easily devolve into an “us-against-them” mentality.** The more the police tend to retreat into such a defensive shell, the community response is likely to mirror the same approach. That kind of standoff undoes any sense of a professional police force which will abide by its oath and too easily can turn into a willingness to accept warlike conditions as a norm. That approach is ultimately a dead end and often a deadly end. We must remember that the police are the professionals in this situation, and therefore they must take the lead in finding resolution to these issues. **In the process of finding workable solutions, there is no room for politics or prejudice, and such solutions are almost never simply more police officers and/or more force.**

### Police Unions

Then there is the older concepts of a brotherhood of police (that term is outdated, not to be replaced by a sisterhood, but perhaps by “family.”) Even that has a defensiveness implied: to protect their family against outside threats. **That is to a large extent what a union is for: to be that family, to be sure that its members are treated fairly and afforded due process.** If the union is to be really effective and provide a real service to the profession, an important part of its role must be to monitor the actions of its membership and hold those who break the community or professional code accountable, to insist on remedial training, or to counsel them out of policing. In certain cases, they must allow their members to be brought to trial while protecting their rights to due process. **To the degree that the union becomes merely defensive, protecting its members regardless of the merits of the case, the union defeats its entire purpose as a professional organization within the society.**

### Protect and Serve

**Another issue that arises is whom do those police officers, their departments, and their unions really protect and serve?** The politics of policing within this society have historically tilted the police toward the socioeconomic elite and the political groups in power at the time. That bias was clear to most people who were not in those

(Continued on page 6)

groups, who therefore looked at the police with some degree of wariness. As time went on and as the police became more professional, more and more of the elements of neutrality began to emerge within police forces. However, the politically powerful and the socioeconomic elite have never lost all of their influence—nor are they likely to.

A police officer's priority cannot be to solely protect and serve themselves or their unions or their departments or their political ends. Their priority cannot be to serve only certain elements of society. Their priority must be to serve all elements of the community and the nation equally and justly in order for the entire process to work as it should and their access to authority really be justified.

### Worldview and Attitude

Perhaps the greatest hurdle at this time is the sense of serving some version of what has been put forward as the true American: basically being a white, Christian, male dominated society. This is also deeply connected to the capitalist economic mantra even though the current version of that mantra no longer much supports ordinary people. It is also a view of the world that supports a brand of militarism as a paramount principle. This also includes a version of American history and culture that is heavily edited to fit the prescriptions of that worldview.

All of these elements, or any of them, cause social friction within the society and especially in communities who see the world differently and experience a very different version of America on a daily basis.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, police forces should not exist to support any particular group, worldview, ideology, or agenda. They must exist within some zone of neutrality in which the professional police



COMMON SENSE II is published by the Itasca Progressive Caucus in Grand Rapids, Minnesota

Editor: Valerie Conner conray@arvig.net

ITASCA PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS  
Chair: Valerie Conner conray@arvig.net

Visit us at [www.itascaprogressive.org](http://www.itascaprogressive.org)

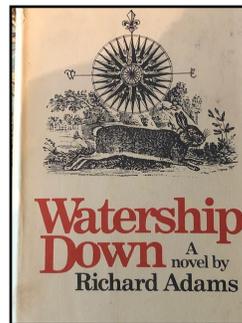
\*computer generated/volunteer labor\*

officers can accomplish their duties and responsibilities as the police oath prescribes. To the degree any of them stray from that path, their protection and service become suspect and counterproductive.

An oath is a sacred pledge to the society and must be kept for community life to have a sense of coherence, unity, and security to become a civil society once again.

## The Devil's Bargain

By Lori Gordon



There's a book I'm sure some of you are familiar with called *Watership Down*. In the story there is a ragtag group of rabbits who go out in search of a new warren, because theirs is threatened by construction. They come across a warren of sleek, healthy rabbits who invite them to join them. There is a man nearby who throws

cabbages and carrots and lettuce onto a compost heap, so food is plentiful. As a bonus, the man also shoots the foxes and weasels who are the natural predators of the rabbits.

The ragtag rabbits think they have found paradise. However, they've noticed that there is a lot of empty space in the warren, and whenever they bring up the subject, the other rabbits quickly change the subject or shut the conversation down. As it turns out, there is an explanation for the extra space. The man who tosses out the cabbages and carrots and lettuce, the man who shoots the foxes and weasels is also the man who puts out snares all around the warren. So, now and again—actually quite regularly and predictably—a rabbit from the warren goes missing. One...and another...and another...and another. But the food is good! And the man with the gun keeps the foxes away.



<http://www.moblog.net/media/m/a/t/mat/rabbit-warning.jpg>

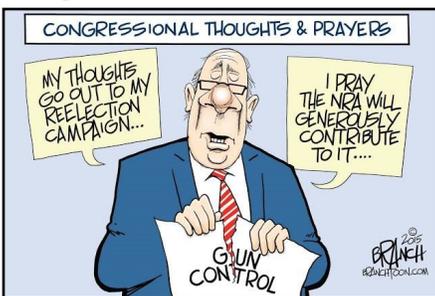
So the devil's bargain that the rabbits have accepted is that they enjoy the plentiful food and the security—that is also insecurity—and they just don't talk about the terrible specter of ongoing violence that haunts their existence. Another empty burrow. Another empty burrow. Another rabbit stopped running. That's their euphemism: stopped running. Because if they talked about it, they

(Continued on page 7)

might have to do something about it. If they did something about it, it might affect the steady access to the food that they've come to depend on. They've accepted that losing other rabbits is just the price they have to pay for the food they want. It would seem they value the food more than the lives of their fellow rabbits.

We, collectively as a society, have a similar devil's bargain. We have a love affair with guns. I'm not decrying the right to bear arms; there are a lot of valid reasons for gun ownership. But we have this problem with guns being misused and abused—not occasionally but regularly. In the last ten years, there have been more than 3,500 mass shootings. Recently in Uvalde, Texas, 19 children and two teachers “stopped running.” We cannot continue to accept that the loss of life is just the price we pay for unfettered freedom. We have the right to bear arms, but we don't have the right to wanton gun violence. We have the right to bear arms, but we don't have the right as a society to say, “It's not my responsibility.”

Shootings such as school shootings, church shootings, movie theater, concert, and store shooting are considered “uncommon” incidents. But what is the definition of “uncommon”? Perhaps something is an “uncommon” incident if we're still



shocked when it happens. But how many of us are still shocked when we hear gun violence stories like a gang shooting, a domestic dispute, a murder/

suicide, a robbery gone wrong? We're saddened—even “deeply saddened”—but how many of us are shocked? We've come to accept gun violence as part of life, and collectively we extend our thoughts and prayers to the bereaved and leave it at that.

At this point, we should be beyond “thoughts and prayers.” As people of faith, we should be angry that teenagers believe that guns are the only answer; we should be disturbed that the media mourns the uncommon shootings but doesn't care about the everyday shootings; we should be deeply saddened that children practice active shooter drills and are taught to play dead in the hopes of staying alive. It doesn't have to be this way. As people of faith, we are called to more than “thoughts and prayers.” In Judaism, it is a sinful act to pray to God about something and then fail to

do any actions that would support that prayer and bring it to fruition. In Christianity, that same thing would fall under the umbrella of taking God's name in vain. Jesus tells us over and over throughout the Gospels to love one another, which means doing everything within our power and capabilities to ensure the well-being of the people around us. Martin Luther said failing to take action that would protect or care for others makes us just as responsible for their deaths. It is not someone else's responsibility to care for our neighbor: it is our responsibility. It is not the task of someone else “over there” to change what needs to be changed. It is our task.

The conversations isn't just about guns, although that's certainly a huge part of it. We need to look at the bigger picture of how society has glorified violence to the point that it is our norm. We need to look at the factors that drive violence. Our calling as Christians—as humans—is to help mend the broken world around us. Doing and saying nothing condones and emboldens the systems that perpetuate violence and brokenness. Jesus spoke out against the injustices and violence and brokenness of the world, because he loved us. Jesus prayed to God saying, “I make your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love, with which you have loved me, may be in them and I in them.” It's our turn to love like Jesus. It's our turn to act for the sake of the world.



[https://live.staticflickr.com/65535/50755777891\\_0e25677e9\\_n.jpg](https://live.staticflickr.com/65535/50755777891_0e25677e9_n.jpg)

I'd like to close with the last part of poet Amanda Gorman's “Hymn for the Hurting”:

*May we not just grieve, but give;  
 May we not just ache, but act;  
 May our signed right to bear arms  
 Never blind our sight from shared harm;  
 May we choose our children over chaos.  
 May another innocent never be lost.  
 Maybe everything hurts,  
 Our hearts shadowed and strange.  
 But only when everything hurts  
 May everything change.*



[https://live.staticflickr.com/8465/8408572578\\_8115581d34\\_b.jpg](https://live.staticflickr.com/8465/8408572578_8115581d34_b.jpg)

