FAILURE TO ACT WOULD BE UNFORGIVABLE

By Heidi Rose

For too many years, the National Rifle Association (NRA) and other gun lobby groups have written our country’s gun laws. The effects have been devastating. Guns kill more than 30,000 men, women and children each year in the United States.

This year the NRA invested more than $11 million in the general elections. Yet across the country, the money the NRA’s political Victory Fund spent to support or oppose candidates in the November 6th election failed to influence voters. On November 6th, the NRA lost big.

According to the Sunlight Foundation, which analyzed the wins and losses of the 30 organizations that spent the most money in the 2012 election, the NRA had the worst results. In fact, less than one percent of the millions of dollars the NRA spent across the country produced the results they wanted. Here in Wisconsin, they spent more than $300,000 in a failed attempt to influence the Baldwin – Thompson Senate race.

Unfortunately, although the NRA is ineffective when it comes to elections, they still have far too much influence on elected officials.

That is why some of our public officials talk as though we don’t have a problem with gun violence in this country. But we need only look at other high income countries, where gun violence isn’t considered a normal part of everyday life, to know that it doesn’t have to be this way.

Whether it is high-profile incidents such as the Sikh temple shooting in Oak Creek and the Azana Spa shooting in Brookfield, or the day-to-day toll that gun violence takes all across our state, it’s time to demand change. Much more can be done to ensure that every Wisconsinite can go to their place of worship, catch a movie or simply go out in public without fearing for their life.

The Brookfield shooting serves as a tragic example of just how broken our gun laws are. In this case the shooter was prohibited from purchasing a gun, but glaring loopholes in our laws made it all too easy for him to buy a gun from a private seller. These types of no-background-check, cash-and-carry sales happen every day in parking lots, at gun shows and online. Sadly, the women killed in Brookfield weren’t the first victims of this loophole, and until background checks are required on ALL gun sales, they certainly won’t be the last.

It would be unforgivable if, after a year filled with gun violence tragedies here in Wisconsin and across the country, our elected leaders failed to act to keep our communities and families safe. As Wisconsinites we need to make it clear that we won’t tolerate inaction. It is time we solve this problem and stop the NRA’s sell-more-guns-at-any-cost agenda.

That’s why WAVE is working to make sure that background checks are required on all gun sales. No one gave up after the state passed the concealed carry law in 2011. In just the last two years, tens of thousands of new WAVE supporters have added their voice to the call for a safer, saner Wisconsin.

You can join the work to prevent gun violence and make it a high priority in the coming year. Let your elected officials know that you want them to act now to require criminal background checks on all gun sales in Wisconsin. We must close the loophole that allows criminals and other prohibited people from purchasing guns.

To help prevent gun violence, contact hrose@WaveEdFund.org or visit www.WaveEdFund.org.

Heidi Rose is the Program Director for Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort and has been working to prevent gun violence for more than ten years. WAVE is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to preventing gun violence, injuries and deaths.
FRAC SAND MINING IN WISCONSIN

By Carl Sack

Last year, WNPJ members organized to prevent mining company Gogebic Taconite and their allies in the legislature from gutting Wisconsin’s environmental permitting process to allow a huge open-pit iron mine in the Penokee Hills, upstream of the Bad River Ojibwe tribe’s wild rice beds. While another pro-iron mining bill is expected to be introduced in the new legislative session in January, there is already a different kind of mining harming communities in our state and poisoning water supplies in others.

Frac sand mining is booming in Wisconsin. Two summers ago, there were 41 sand mines and processing plants operating or proposed in the state. That number doubled in less than a year. Pockets of Western Wisconsin are experiencing the greatest growth: Trempealeau County now has 21 sites, Jackson County has 17, and Chippewa and Barron Counties each have 14.

As of October, there were 95 permitted sand facilities and another 20 proposed. The average mine size is about 350 acres, with some as big as 1,800 acres. A new processing plant in Chippewa Falls — one of 15 operational or in development — uses 18,000 gallons of fresh water and ships out 50 train cars full of sand per day, according to the WI Center for Investigative Journalism.

Wisconsin’s sand has attracted some big out-of-state companies, like EOG Resources (formerly Enron Oil & Gas) of Houston and Superior Silica Sands of Kosse, Texas. Their operations pose significant health risks to workers and local residents. Silica dust, picked up from sand piles by the wind, is known to cause silicosis and lung cancer. The sand washing process uses polyacrylamide, a neurotoxin powerful enough that the EPA considers any amount unsafe in drinking water. Despite the health risks, the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) rejected a citizen petition to list respirable crystalline silica (silica dust) as a hazardous air pollutant and monitor air quality around sand mining operations.

Where the sand ends up is even more troubling. Although Wisconsin sand has been mined for over a century, its rounded grains and high silica content make it ideal for use in hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. This dangerous type of fossil fuel extraction has increased rapidly in the past few years, driving the boom in sand mines.

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Every fracking well leaks methane into the atmosphere, where it has a hundred times the heat-trapping impact of carbon dioxide. Those who live near wells complain of constant headaches, persistent colds, and tap water turning brown or containing so much methane that it can be lit on fire.

The Energy Policy Act of 2005 exempted gas companies from nearly all provisions of the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. This “Halliburton Loophole” has been used aggressively by oil and gas companies to avoid being monitored or reporting what chemicals they use in the fracking process. Independent studies have found dozens of known poisons and carcinogens in groundwater near fracking sites. Frackers injected 32 million gallons of diesel fuel from 2005 to 2009, in violation of one of the few regulations that still apply.

Citizens in the impacted states are fighting back, pushing for moratoriums and bans on fracking, such as the moratorium currently in force in New York State. Here in Wisconsin, residents of sand country are recognizing the connection between our hills disappearing, poisoned drinking water in other states and climate change.

Residents of Monroe, Dunn, Trempeleau, Chippewa, Buffalo and other Wisconsin counties, along with groups in southeast Minnesota, have banded together to speak out at town and county board meetings against sand mining in their communities. The grassroots Save the Hills Alliance is pushing local governments to pass moratoriums and bans on sand mining. There have even been a few pickets, with seven protesters from Winona, MN arrested in October for unfurling an anti-sand mining banner atop a bus at an industry conference. So far, six sand site proposals have been rejected by town and county governments due to public pressure.

The WNPJ Environment Working Group has re-started regular conference calls to bring together people fighting frac sand mining in their community with those working against power lines, iron mining and other attempts from corporations to profit at the expense of our state’s air, water, ecosystems, culture and public health. To join the calls, e-mail carl@wnpj.org.

Carl Sack is a UW-Madison geography graduate, an ex officio WNPJ Board member and a work-study staffer for WNPJ's environmental working group.

Please use the postcards in this newsletter to let your state legislators know you support protecting our waters from mining. Thank you!

Did you know that there’s a collection of peace and justice books and videos at the WNPJ office? We encourage you to stop by and borrow whatever seems interesting and useful to you.

Thanks to WNPJ member Jean McElhaney for her recent donations to our library, including The Disarmament Catalogue (edited by Murray Polner, 1982), Swords Into Plowshares: Non-violent Direct Action for Disarmament (edited by Arthur Laffin and Anne Montgomery, 1987), War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning (Chris Hedges, 2002), and Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism (David Cortright, 2006). Another recent donation includes the following for those interested in food politics: The Botany of Desire (Michael Pollan 2001), Omnivore’s Dilemma (Michael Pollan 2006) and Stuffed and Starved (Raj Patel, 2007)

Please call us at (608) 250-9240 before you visit, to make sure the office is open.
LETTER FROM A SOLDIER: ON LEARNING ABOUT THE BOMB

Introduction by Sue Robbins

My father Irving Robbins was drafted near the end of World War II. At the time he was 36 years old, a high school English teacher and married, with a young daughter. In 1945, after being stationed at several locations in the United States, he was sent overseas to Okinawa. Between June 26th and August 31, 1945, as he traveled to the west coast, boarded a transport ship to Okinawa, and was stationed there, he wrote 40 or more letters to my mother. This letter was written when my father first learned of the development of the atomic bomb and the possibility that it might be used as a weapon against Japan and before hearing of its use on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

August 8, 1945
Dear Gertrude,

When you know that mail will go out only when we reach a port, there is not much incentive to write except when one has a real thought. Tonight I have one.

Of course everyone on the ship is agog with the news of the new atomic bomb and its possibilities. My first reaction was to rejoice to feel that we had another weapon to annihilate our enemies and bring the end of the war closer. Now that I have learned a little more, I have a great fear of what the future will bring. We have really come to a turning point not only in the history of western nations but in the history of man on earth. Wells in his “War of the Worlds” or Shiel in his “Purple Cloud” never dreamed of anything as fantastic as the bomb that not only kills all persons in a tremendous area but makes that region uninhabitable for years to come. It seems to me that the end of the war with Japan is a matter of secondary importance. I am sure they will give in soon – perhaps this week. I hope so for I would hate to see any people exterminated or part of the earth’s surface blighted.

The question in my mind is “What will follow?” Will this convince all nations that future was is unthinkable for it would mean the destruction of civilization with only Bushman and Laplanders surviving? Perhaps it will mean that in which case we may have on earth a golden age such as has never existed before. I am inclined to doubt it. We will still have our rabble-rousers to grow fat on every hate and prejudice, our predatory industrialists or chauvinistic militarists – Will they not in inevitably cause the final conflagration? I fear it.

I long to think of us and Susan living happy lives in a world free of fear – ironic that this was one of the four freedoms we were in this war for and perhaps now we will never be free of fear.

Perhaps you will receive this letter at a time when there is general rejoicing at a victory over the Japanese in which case this letter will certainly seem out of joint. Matthew Arnold’s poem that I quoted to you a few weeks ago seems distinctly more apropos now.

If the world is to be frightful, let us make our ivory tower and make the best of it. If it has a chance for becoming a better place, let us do all we can to make it so.

As I look back upon this letter, it seems more a sermon and pretty dismal at that. But this is what I am thinking now if you want to know it.

One more thought – I love you dearly.

Rab

Sue Robbins was raised in a family that was always involved in peace and justice issues. She has been an advocate for children and families, and is a mediator in special education and for reducing homelessness.

DOVER BEACH
By Matthew Arnold, 1867
4h Stanza

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.
On a recent visit to the UK, I was taken by a relative to the National Memorial Arboretum. I had never heard of this and didn’t know what to expect. What I found was a tribute to men and women who had served and died in military service, a tribute involving 150 acres and the planting of 50,000 trees. It’s important to realize that this is not a cemetery. To quote the official brochure: “the Arboretum is a place to stroll and enjoy the trees. From the start it was seen as a place of joy where the lives of people would be remembered by living trees that would grow and mature in a world at peace.”

This living memorial, this place of remembrance and reflection, was begun in 1997 and opened in 2001. There are over 150 memorials and plots for the armed forces, civilian organizations and voluntary groups who have played a part in serving the country. There are gardens devoted to members of the police forces, the postal services, to Fire and Rescue and Ambulance services; even a ship’s cat is remembered. There is a Jewish memorial, which reminds of the years in which Jews were driven from Britain. There is a Gallipoli memorial, provided by Turks in memory of the Australians who died fighting against Turkey during World War I.

On a small hill overlooking the center of the arboretum is the Armed Forces Memorial, a stunning piece of architecture. Two curved walls almost 50 feet long, embrace two straight walls on which are written the names of men and women of Her Majesty’s Armed Forces who lost their lives in conflict or as a result of terrorist action or on training exercises since the end of the Second World War. In this time the British Armed Forces have taken part in more than 50 operations and conflicts around the world, often as part of United Nations, NATO or other international coalitions. New names are added every year. That there is room for many thousands of names to be added suggests that there remain lessons to be learned.

The cost of armed conflict is centrally on display, in two large bronze sculptures, representing loss and sacrifice. In one, shown here, a Serviceman is raised aloft on a stretcher by comrades. Family members look on - a mother clasped by a child and an older couple clutching each other in anguish. It speaks of the cost of armed conflict to those left behind - the families, loved ones and friends who live with the pain and consequence of their loss for the rest of their lives.

In the other, the body of a warrior is being prepared for burial by female and Gurkha soldiers. The figure before the double doors points to a world beyond where the warrior will rest as another figure chisels the name on the memorial. On a platform between the two sculptures lies a bronze laurel wreath. At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month (remembered in Britain as Armistice Day, and in the USA as Veteran’s Day) the sun’s rays stream through the opening in the wall behind the second sculpture, illuminating the wreath.

Nearby stands the Millennium Chapel of Peace and Forgiveness, created to offer a place of tranquility and reflection to people of every faith or none, with a service of remembrance every day. But the most poignant memorial of all, for me, was one dedicated to the 306 servicemen shot for desertion or cowardice during the First World War. Today they would be recognized as suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. That those who administer this garden of memories were able to acknowledge the tragic mistakes of the past may be a sign of our growing humanity.

Sheila Spear, a former WNPJ Board member and current editor of the Network News, began her peace activism while in high school in the north of England.
Thanks to everyone who made our member assembly and awards reception this year truly memorable, from our organizing committee (Mary Beth Schlagheck, Paul Moriarity, Bill Christofferson, Annie Dutcher, Tom McGrath and Jessie Read) to our presenters (Pardeep Kaleka of Serve To Unite, Mike Helbick of Peace Action, Rob Danielson of SOUL of the Kickapoo and Jeri Bonavia of WAVE), our inspiring awardees (Autonomous Solidarity Organization, Mike Wiggins Jr, Mary Jo Berner, Kristina “kiki” Kosnick, and Joe and Joyce Ellwanger), plus all who brought or donated delicious food and all who helped us eat it!

The highlights included hearing from Mr. Kaleka, whose father was killed in the vicious attack on the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek in August. He and others founded Serve To Unite in response to the murders, to foster communication and understanding among and between faith traditions and communities. To illustrate our deeper commonalities, Mr. Kaleka asked everyone to raise their hand if they had ever felt scared, if they had been hurt, or if they loved their children.

Another highlight — in addition to the informative presentations on runaway war spending, energy issues and gun violence — was former WNPJ Board member and recently ordained pastor Marilyn Miller’s moving introduction to our Lifetime Achievement Award winners, Reverend Joe and Joyce Ellwanger. Marilyn had grown up in Milwaukee’s Cross Lutheran Church, which Joe helped transform from a small, all-white to a large, diverse congregation. Joe later remarked that if his only accomplishment at the Church had been helping Marilyn to find her calling, he would be happy.

We also welcomed three wonderful new members to our Board. Rob Danielson of LaFarge was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War and worked as an educator and filmmaker. He currently addresses energy and environmental issues with WNPJ member group SOUL of the Kickapoo. Annie Dutcher of Madison chairs the Madison Mennonite Church’s Peace and Justice Committee and works with a nonprofit that helps lung cancer patients live longer and better. Carlos Miranda of Madison is the son of two working-class immigrants, has been at the Workers Rights Center for five years and is also a member of the Interpreters Cooperative of Madison. One of our continuing Board members, Liz Bruno, also became an officer in the new role of co-secretary, along with Barb Munson.

Lastly, we bid a fond farewell and thank for their many contributions to WNPJ our outgoing Board members Mary Beth Schlagheck, Todd Dennis, Deb Foster, Margie Jessup, Liz Klainot and Kelly Westlund. You will be missed, but we know we’ll see you somewhere soon.

For educational justice!

We’re proud to announce that WNPJ has become a founding member of the Wisconsin Educational Justice Coalition.

WNPJ member group GSAFE, the Gay Straight Alliance for Safe Schools, proposed the coalition to support and grow efforts towards educational justice for youth of color and indigenous youth, low-income youth, youth with disabilities and LGBTQ youth in Wisconsin schools.

In addition to GSAFE and WNPJ, the founding coalition members include the Wisconsin Indian Education Association, Voces de la Frontera / Youth Empowered in the Struggle, Urban Underground, Freedom Inc. and Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities.

Coalition members will soon start meeting to determine our process and priorities. Possible priority issues include race-based “Indian” mascots, safety and respect for youth with disabilities and LGBTQ youth, and restorative justice practices that diminish the school to prison pipeline. Stay tuned!

We need your help

Your old computer or volunteer time could make a huge difference to WNPJ!

One of our most pressing office needs is a replacement for our 2004 Dell computer that works slowly on a good day (don’t ask us about the bad ones!). If you have a reliable, more recent model Windows /PC computer that you could donate to WNPJ, we’d greatly appreciate it — and send you an “in kind” donation letter for your tax records.

Given our decreased staff levels, we’re also looking for volunteer help with our annual updating of member group information. Tasks include making follow-up calls, organizing information and posting it online.

If you can help with either, please contact us at diane@wnpj.org or (608) 250-9240. Thank you!
It has often been said that “existence is resistance” in Palestine. From what I have seen here, Gazans are doing far more than just existing. They are standing up with dignity and ingenuity to a slow and inhuman process of destabilization and colonization that many feel is intended to gradually force Gaza to become uninhabitable for Palestinians. Mohamed Baker and the other fishermen’s refusal to acquiesce to the destruction of their livelihoods is a victory over the cowardly conscience of Israeli soldiers who make sport of shooting unarmed men, most of whom are very poor and supporting families with over ten children.

It’s also heartening to witness that after such a traumatic eight days where many people did not leave their houses for fear of their lives, Gaza’s streets are alive. Just across from our apartment at Al-Bakri Tower, families are filling a wedding hall. Dozens of youth pile into the back of trucks, enthusiastically beating on drums. Adults and children alike laugh and hold hands as they perform Debke, a traditional wedding dance. Though Khalil Shahin, director of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, has spent long nights taking only as little as two hours of sleep while documenting and double-checking the casualties and injuries from the conflict to avoid duplication, he still smiles brightly as he tells of reviving plans for his daughter’s upcoming wedding, which had been postponed due to the fighting.

In the afternoons, children pour out of the schools, many of which were used to shelter thousands during the recent bombings. They kick cans and soccer balls while approaching our delegation with openness, curiosity and playfulness. The shock they have just endured will likely remain with them in some ways for the rest of their life, but the strong sense of community and family is evident. I cannot help but wonder how children and families from the United States would cope given such conditions, especially the youth, so that both Israel and Palestine’s children can live as neighbours. His sentiment was not without critique of long needed political changes that would have to be implemented for this vision to be a possibility. However, the intention I sensed from his words reminded me of what Mamie Till uttered so profoundly in response to the brutal and racist lynching of her son in Mississippi in the fall of 1955: “I have not a minute to hate. I’ll pursue justice for the rest of my life.”

Joshua Brollier (joshua@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence (vcnv.org). This piece is excerpted from a longer article, which can be read in full at www.wnpj.org.
If you would rather receive our newsletter online, please email diane@wnpj.org.